

RECOVERING OUR SOJOURNER IDENTITY:  
AN EXHORTATION FOR OTHERWORLDLINESS FOR CHRISTIAN  
POSTMODERN GENERATIONS

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## DEDICATION

To my loving wife, Erica, my support and companion for life.

Thank you.

Soli Deo Gloria.

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## ABSTRACT

In light of postmodernism's deconstruction of metanarratives, Christians of this generation have lost sight of their story. Within that story lies their identity as God's people rather than a people of this world's kingdom. This thesis-project aims to offer an argument for Christian postmodern generations to return to their narrative of faith as a people of God and as a people distinct from the kingdom of this world. By analyzing the identity crisis of Christian postmodern generations as not knowing the otherworldliness aspect of their faith, and seeking to see how identity is formed communally and scripturally, we will see how a sojourner identity is lived out in the scriptures and recommend that a sojourner identity is the best way to balance the bicultural reality of a Christian living in this world but not being of this world.

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Korean American Evangelical Experience as an Example of Bicultural-ness**

Whenever the Olympics come around, young Korean Americans are faced with this dilemma, “what country do I root for?” Especially when it is the year of the Winter Olympics, speed skating, a sport where both South Korea and the United States are well accomplished in, can cause a lot of confusion as to where one’s allegiance ought to lie. This is just a glimpse into the mental exercise and emotional conflict that goes on in the minds and hearts of bicultural Americans. The question of “where does my allegiance lie?” is a question that every Korean American living in the United States must answer. In *God’s New Whiz Kids?*, Rebecca Kim discusses the college campus phenomenon of second generation Korean American Evangelicals choosing to attend ethnic-specific Christian campus ministries instead of assimilating to Caucasian campus ministries. This example shows Korean Americans choosing an allegiance towards their ethnicity rather than their immigrant environment. “This pattern conflicts with assimilation theories that expect ethnic identification to decline, not increase, with socioeconomic mobility and entrance into mainstream institutions and organizations.”<sup>1</sup> Let us take a brief look at her study in order to further illustrate the tension of acculturation that exists within the minds and hearts of bicultural Americans but also to see how it explains the role identity plays in the bicultural American’s decision making process of which side to belong to.

Kim’s book contains scattered stories of young Korean American college students and young professionals recollecting past memories of how they realized that they were

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Kim, *God’s New Whiz Kids?* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 3.

different from their non-Korean friends. A young Korean American Evangelical explains his reason for choosing a Korean American Christian ministry by saying he felt that he did not fit in at a white church:

I grew up with white people, but I don't know. I grew up in the Korean church and the majority of my Korean friends are Christian, while all of my white friends are Jewish....I just felt like I did not fit in at the white church....I had white friends before....Maybe it is because church time is the time that I am used to being with Koreans, because that is what I grew up with....It is what I am familiar with.<sup>2</sup>

But not only the *feeling* of not fitting in, but constantly being *reminded* that one was different was a harsh reality check for some students. An adopted Korean American woman shared, "There are times when [my adopted white family] would be sitting at a restaurant or something, and people would just stare....One time this kid at a restaurant stood up in the middle of dinner, pointed at me, and said something like 'look Mom, a Chinese girl.'....I can think that I am like my [white] sisters all I want, but others will not see me that way."<sup>3</sup> Or another Korean American woman shares, "Growing up I never thought that I was that different. But I remember kids telling me, because they tend to be very honest and direct...they would ask, 'why is your face so flat? How can you see from your eyes?'"<sup>4</sup> But physical differences were not the only markers of being different. Marginalization also pointed to status differences for Korean Americans along with the reality of a "glass ceiling" in the workplace.<sup>5</sup> So rather than being treated as an ethnic minority without opportunities to advance in positions of authority or status, Korean Americans find strength in their numbers. Kim explains,

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<sup>2</sup> Kim, 82.

<sup>3</sup> Kim, 83.

<sup>4</sup> Kim, 83.

<sup>5</sup> Kim, 97.

SGKAs [second generation Korean Americans] who have strived and obtained socioeconomic mobility want to be treated accordingly; they want to have the status, power, and recognition in proportion to their achievement. Finding that these desires are not met in white-dominant or multiracial settings, they go elsewhere. They form and join campus ministries, organizations, where they can be the majority in power and not be marginalized as an ethnic or racial minority.<sup>6</sup>

Kim's argument is that their *ethnic identity* guides them towards the direction of choosing one side over the other. Desire for community, desire for being together with people of similar interests and experiences (homophily, as described by sociologists)<sup>7</sup>, and desire for majority status, direct young Korean American Evangelicals towards determining their allegiance to one group over the other, "These three interactive processes guide SGKAs' preference for ethnic-specific over pan-ethnic, multiracial, and predominately white campus ministries."<sup>8</sup> Ultimately this expresses itself as "...SGKAs will congregate with those who share experiences of growing up in immigrant families and churches and straddling two cultures. This tendency, along with the desire for majority group status and power, interacts with continuing ethnic/racial categorizations and marginalization to make separate ethnic associations more desirable."<sup>9</sup> Kim explains that this tri-factor process is the new model of emergent ethnicity.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, in Kim's study, ethnic identity plays a vital role in one's choice of allegiance. We want to take a look at another bicultural study which also concludes with the importance of identity, but this time in how one determines his or her functional role within society.

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<sup>6</sup> Kim, 87.

<sup>7</sup> Kim, 78.

<sup>8</sup> Kim, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Kim, 88.

<sup>10</sup> Kim, 13-14, 71-88.



Elaine Ecklund's *Korean American Evangelicals* provides insight into the bicultural discussion with its study on the role of Evangelical faith in the formation of civic responsibility and duty. In the book, Ecklund traces the formation of the civic life of Korean American Evangelical Christians. She notes how their immigrant background, ethnicity, and congregational model work to create two models of civic life. First let us describe the two main churches of Ecklund's study. One church, named Grace, was of the congregation model that is independent from the first generation Korean American church, yet sharing the same space, while the other church, Manna, was of the congregation model of total separation from a first generation Korean American church and a ministry focus/goal of multi-ethnicity. Each congregational model leads to a different model of civic life. Ecklund describes the first as a communal model of civic life, which "rhetorically deemphasizes self-focus, and emphasizes obligations to the congregation and wider American society."<sup>11</sup> This model occurs in the Grace Church congregational context. The second model is the individually-negotiated model of civic responsibility, where "the leaders [of the church] place a priority on member self-understanding and leave community involvement up to personal decision."<sup>12</sup> This model forms within the Manna Church congregational context. What is important to note is that whether it is realized communally or individually, both congregations focus on the responsibility of serving the immediate local community that their churches are situated in. This concern for ethnic groups outside their own ethnicity is unexpected. Ecklund explains,

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<sup>11</sup> Elaine Ecklund, *Korean American Evangelicals* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 52.

<sup>12</sup> Ecklund, 52.

Even though they are economically successful, as nonwhite Americans they also face significant barriers and discrimination in the course of their daily lives, with other Americans continuing to view them as ‘perpetual foreigners.’ Because of discrimination and this sense of ‘otherness,’ it is not obvious that Korean Americans will be motivated to show concern for racial and ethnic groups outside their own.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, such discrimination caused sociologists to expect second generation Korean Americans to be oblivious of any civic duty or responsibility and become more and more ethnocentric. However, rather than becoming aloof towards their immigrant society, these Korean American Evangelicals maintain a sense of obligation towards society. Ecklund attributes this phenomenon to their practice of faith and the role it plays in determining their functional lives in society, “Through their church communities, Korean Americans have access to cultural schemas or interpretative frameworks that enable them to use *spirituality* [emphasis mine] to order race and socioeconomic positions that they then can use to construct civic identities.”<sup>14</sup> Technical sociological jargon (i.e. cultural schemas/interpretive frameworks) aside, we see that spirituality, or identity of faith, functions in the Korean American Evangelical’s determining of his or her role and responsibility in civic society.

Admittedly, the two congregation’s approach on how much to assimilate to American society is different. If we were to take the example of the Winter Olympics above, we would imagine that Korean Americans of Manna Church would be more likely to root for Team USA, while the congregants of Grace Church would probably root for South Korea. Though their allegiance to their immigrant society with regard to rooting for an Olympic team may differ, the way they determine their functional role in their

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<sup>13</sup> Ecklund, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Ecklund, 91.

immigrant society is similar. Their civic identity is formed in part through their spiritual/faith identity and practice, and so they draw the same conclusion for their civic duty and responsibility. So through Ecklund's study, we see how faith identity helps a bicultural person determine his or her functional role in his or her immigrant society.

### **Christian Identity is Vital for Balancing Acculturation to a Secular World**

Our look into Kim's *God's New Whiz Kids?* and Ecklund's *Korean American Evangelicals* helps us begin our thinking and discussion on identity for Christians, for it finds various similarities to the immigrant and bicultural life. For instance, Apostle Peter, in his first epistle, describes the bicultural or dual-identity of Christians in this way; he reminds his readers that Christians are "aliens and strangers in the world."<sup>15</sup> Yet he immediately reminds us that relations with the world are not severed and instead must be maintained: "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."<sup>16</sup> With this we are left with the difficult balancing act of being in the world and not of the world. This tension has befuddled many Christians throughout the history of the church and has led to many treatises on how to resolve the tension. However, most fall short in their suggestions because of a lack of practical offerings for Christian living, while others are so practical that the actual principle of other-worldliness is compromised or lost altogether. So the question is one of acculturation, "Just how much is enough or too much?" Ultimately it is a wisdom issue that each Christian must face, but an

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Peter 2:11. This phrase will be discussed further in Chapter 1, where we will contend with Scott McKnight's argument that this phrase is not a metaphor for the spiritual pilgrimage of Christians.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Peter 2:12.

understanding of what one's true identity is what helps answer this question. This treatise, then, while making references to the aforementioned bicultural, immigrant life<sup>17</sup> as a helpful case study, hopes to provide guidelines to better equip the Christian to live out his or her life as one not of this world but in the world, or better described as a sojourner identity.

Ecklund began her study by stating in her introduction, "Second-generation Korean American evangelicals are trying to create identities that are different from those of their immigrant parents, identities that fully incorporate being a Korean and an American in the context of being a Christian."<sup>18</sup> We then see that even in the formation of civic identity, race and culture play important roles. Ultimately, Ecklund argues that the function of religion in immigrant life helps form civic responsibilities in second generation citizens. This is a pattern that helps us better understand our own citizenship as the people of God living in an earthly kingdom. This is the paradigm we want to propose for postmodern generations to successfully navigate their lives as aliens and strangers of this world.

A discussion on race and ethnicity is not the purpose of this project, however. The aforementioned studies by Kim and Ecklund demonstrate a far more proficient capacity to handle such a complex topic of race and culture on a sociological level. Suffice it to say, then, that the reference to bicultural-ness is employed to better illustrate our Christian sojourner identity as a bifurcated reality. And the above illustrations helped to highlight the importance of identity (either racial identity for Kim's study or

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<sup>17</sup> Namely the Christian Korean American life.

<sup>18</sup> Ecklund, 14.

spiritual/faith identity in Ecklund's study) functioning as an important criterion for how one interacts with his or her surrounding environment. So in this treatise, we posit that the role of faith serving as a guiding standard of identity formation in a Christian's interaction with his or her surrounding world is utterly vital and necessary. So a call back to one's faith identity in Christ is the thesis of this paper.

### **Sojourner Identity in a Postmodern World**

In light of a postmodern context, however, the balance of acculturation is tipping towards a worldly identity and away from an otherworldly one. Let us take a brief look at the postmodern context through David Lyon's attempt to define and analyze it.

In the second edition of his book, *Postmodernity*, David Lyon has difficulty defining postmodernity and admits to its existence but lacking a universal definition.<sup>19</sup> Actually, it is this difficulty that provides significant insight into postmodernity. It is in step with postmodernism that scholars have a difficult time providing a definition. Postmodernism would not believe that there is an absolute "essential" this or that. The "essence" of something is not predetermined or defined, but relative and contextual.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Lyon's inability to provide a definition is telling of the centerlessness of postmodernity. In order to reveal the centerlessness of postmodernity, Lyon traces the understanding of reality in western thought. He traces the evolution of western thought via three stages, "A highly significant series of western ideas starts with 'Providence'

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<sup>19</sup> David Lyon, *Postmodernity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 6, 108.

<sup>20</sup> Lyon, 10, 103.

which is transposed to ‘Progress’ and shifts from there into ‘Nihilism’.”<sup>21</sup> In short, providence is the idea that God leads humanity towards an ultimate goal; progress is the idea that man leads humanity towards an optimistic, improved goal; and nihilism is the idea that there is no goal and there ought be no one leading anyone. The latter is said to have developed when the machine of modernity, which was the great optimistic movement of progress, turned its tool of doubt – previously used to overthrow providence – upon its champion, reason. Friedrich Nietzsche is the one who ushers in nihilism. He challenged science and challenged any and all authorities that would impose its meaning of reality and truth upon a people, “So-called systems of reasons, asserts Nietzsche, are actually systems of persuasion. Thus claims to have discovered truth are unmasked as what Nietzsche called the ‘will to power’. Those making such claims place themselves above those to whom the claims are made, thus dominating them”.<sup>22</sup> Reality, then, is up for grabs. It has no set definition and the interest of postmodernity is the emphasis of the local over the universal. Therefore, there is no longer any source for truth or reality. So instead of seeing a reality coming from above or from us, it comes from nothing, ultimately saying that there is no “essential” reality. And this sparks the beginnings of more centerlessness once in the hands of post-modern thinkers.

Lyon traces the further de-centering of realities by highlighting Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, and Jean-Francois Lyotard. These are some of the men that provide the tools and substantiate the focus of emphasizing relativism and contextualization in light of fragmented and disparate realities. Here are some of the

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<sup>21</sup> Lyon, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Lyon, 11.

principles that are drawn from these men: “With no God to guarantee them, signifiers float free, to be understood only in relation to one another, seen in different discourses”<sup>23</sup>; metanarratives (systems/“stories” of reasoning or truth) are to be questioned; “[computer technologies] have helped shift the emphasis to ‘performativity’, the efficiency and productivity of systems, and away from the issues of intrinsic value or purposes of knowledge”<sup>24</sup>; “to suggest a linear progression of concepts and to explore the connection between each in terms of their antecedents is a hopelessly modernist enterprise...[instead] a line of descent is traced, but no causal connections are assumed and no origins are sought.”<sup>25</sup> All these principles point to a foundationless, center-less reality that is only understood by the relative local or by practicality. But centerlessness is not only resulted by philosophical thought. Consumerism plays a huge role in creating a center-less society, “Once established, such a culture of consumption is quite indiscriminating and everything becomes a consumer item, including meaning, truth, and knowledge”.<sup>26</sup> If anything, consumerism only further embodies the thrust of locality and practicality. And so we have it, intellectuals pushing us forward to a center-less realm and consumerism manifesting those elements into a modern-day reality.

Postmodernism’s disdain for metanarratives and its consumerist drive has threatened the sojourner identity in the lives of young Christians in the postmodern age. In postmodernists’ eyes, Christianity has simply become the white man’s monolithic religion; so such lifestyle or viewpoint is too closed minded. Hence, an identity crisis for

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<sup>23</sup> Lyon, 15.

<sup>24</sup> Lyon, 17.

<sup>25</sup> Lyon, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Lyon, 76.

Christian postmodern generations is in effect. Postmodern generational Christians are finding it harder to apply their faith identity to their lives in a secular world, and so are losing their faith identity to a centerless reality altogether. An exhortation to recover our sojourner identity as postmodern generational Christians is in order, that our lives lived in this secular world is not to assume the philosophies and principles of this world.<sup>27</sup> So we will discuss how a sojourner identity is formed and executed (lived out) in a postmodern context by exploring theological writings on culture and postmodernism and offering a biblical discussion on the exilic life of Daniel and the bicultural life of Paul. It will be argued that the standard in which Daniel and Paul used to determine how much to embrace their secular surroundings and how much to refrain from it stems from their identity found in their relation with their covenantal Lord. In addition, a four lesson bible study on the topic of sojourner identity will be included in the appendix for the further exhortation and edification of God's people, His church. So let us now discuss the matter of identity formation for Christian postmodern generations.

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<sup>27</sup> Colossians 2:20.



## CHAPTER 1

### IDENTITY FORMATION

A discussion of how identity is formed is needed in order to make an exhortation for a sojourner identity. The understanding of the self, however, has evolved throughout history. And since we are advocating a specific identity for postmoderns, we then ought to explore the self in light of the postmodern context. For that discussion we turn to Calvin Schrag.

#### **Finding the Self in Postmodernity and Beyond**

In his book, *The Self after Postmodernity*, Calvin Schrag asks the question of how to locate the self. He continues what started with Gilbert Ryle in deconstructing the Cartesian dualism of mind and body. Descartes attributed to the mind the place of self, “I think, therefore I am.” He utilized the mind to explain the “what” of the self. But the problem that exists is “that the definition of the self as a mental substance remains forever undecidable, perpetually deferred, destined to become a vacuous concept.”<sup>1</sup> It remains a mysterious substance that cannot be fully tangible, thus the “ghost” that functions the machine. So the self cannot simply be described as the ghost in the machine or some abstract sense of reason. It is not tangible enough. Postmodernism also reacts against the Cartesian self by arguing that not only is there no intangible self, there is no definitive self whatsoever. “If one cannot rid oneself of the vocabulary of self, subject, and mind, the most that can be asserted is that the self is multiplicity,

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<sup>1</sup> Calvin Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 13.

heterogeneity, difference, and ceaseless becoming, bereft of origin and purpose. Such is the manifesto of postmodernity on matters of the human subject as self and mind.”<sup>2</sup> That is why the self for postmoderns is jettisoned.<sup>3</sup> However, Schrag wants to attack the classical view of the self, but does not want to be rid of the self completely. Rather, according to Schrag, there is no ghost; instead it is no longer a matter of the “what” of the self, but rather the “who” of the self. The “who” of the self, then, is found in discourse, “The self is implicated in its discourse as a who that at the crossroads of speech and language understands itself as a self that has already spoken, is now speaking, and has the power yet to speak, suspended across the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future.”<sup>4</sup> He defines discourse as consisting of two parts, speech and language. Both of these are needed to make up discourse. Language is linguistics, simply the scientific study of grammar and words. Speech is the act of using language. These two combined make up discourse. Yet even discourse has a context, and that is the narrative. Narrative is the backdrop that situates discourse, “Narrative provides the ongoing context in which figures of discourse are embedded and achieve their determinations of sense and reference.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore it is in the narrative that the self is formed and known.

By locating the self in discourse and in the narrative then, Schrag is not carving the self in stone, but rather situating it. “The story of the self is a developing story, a story subject to a creative advance, wherein the past is never simply a series of nows that have lapsed into non-being, but a text, an inscription of events and experiences, that

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<sup>2</sup> Schrag, 8.

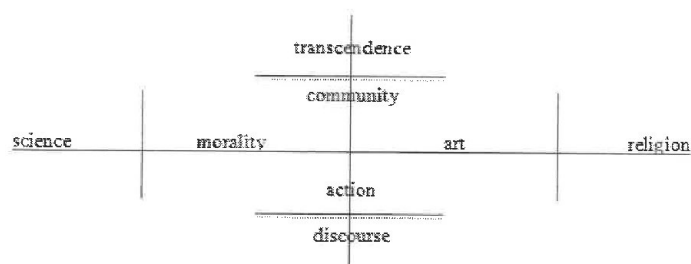
<sup>3</sup> Schrag, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Schrag, 17.

<sup>5</sup> Schrag, 19.

stands open to new interpretations and new perspectives of meaning.”<sup>6</sup> So the self is a dynamic self. It is situated but still changing in context. In order to illustrate Schrag’s point let us think of an example from chemistry. Chemistry describes the atomic structure as consisting of protons, neutrons, and electrons. In explaining the electron the description of the “electron cloud” is used. One can never pinpoint the exact location of an electron particle, because it is always moving. Thus chemistry books and teachers have offered the electron cloud image: a description of the general vicinity of the electron particle at any given point in time. In a sense, Schrag is doing the same. He agrees with postmodernity that the self is changing and not “unified”, but he does want to define self, which he does by way of praxis. The “who” of the self then exists within electron clouds: the self in discourse, the self in action, the self in community, and the self in transcendence. These domains all contribute in situating the self and explaining who “the who” of the self is. Schrag gives his own illustration to explain these categories in historical procession alongside what he argues are the four domains: “configurations of human experience that are generally referenced in literature as the ‘culture-spheres’ of modernity.”<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 1. Calvin Schrag’s Self in the Diachronics of Historical Constitution<sup>8</sup>**



<sup>6</sup> Schrag, 37.

<sup>7</sup> Schrag, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Schrag, 5.

Then with these categories provided by Schrag, we will proceed to try and explain the formation of a sojourner identity in action, developed in community, and found in relation to our Savior and Lord.

### **Forming and Building Identity**

Now that we have been able to “locate” the self, let us take a look at how an identity is formed for that self. We take the four categories proposed by Schrag (Self in discourse, action, community, and transcendence) and discuss them within the three loci of the identity of the self formed theologically (in transcendence), formed confessionally (in discourse), and formed covenantally (in community). For those three loci we now turn to Miroslav Volf, the Heidelberg Catcheism, and S. Steve Kang and Gary Parrett.

#### **Theologically Formed (in Transcendence)**

So let us first take a look at how Miroslav Volf’s discussion of distance *and* belonging helps Christians identify themselves. Volf starts by saying that the faith as it began with Abraham was about leaving one’s culture:

To be a child of Abraham and Sarah and to respond to the call of their God means to make an exodus, to start a voyage, become a stranger (Genesis 23:4; 24:1-9)...But the solution for being a stranger in a wrong way is not full naturalization, but being a stranger in the *right* way...At the very core of Christian identity lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty, from a given culture with its gods to the God of all cultures...Departure is part and parcel of Christian identity. Since Abraham is our ancestor, our faith is “at odds with place.”<sup>9</sup>

So the Christian identity is about finding his or her new identity not in the gods of their old culture, but in the God of faith and actually making a departure from that old culture

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<sup>9</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 39-40.

to God's culture. The next problem is then how does one understand his or her Christian identity with an ancient Hebrew that we have no blood ties with? Leaving one's old culture does not mean flattening out one's background in order to be connected to an ancient Hebrew. So by introducing Paul's discussion of the seed of Abraham being Christ (cf. Gal 3-4), Volf argues that Paul allowed for even the non-Jews to be a member of that faith. Through Christ, the promised seed of Abraham, non-Hebrews too are welcomed to the faith.<sup>10</sup> Although this can be language for a pre-New Perspective on Paul,<sup>11</sup> it helps to understand how a Christian can understand his or her "in the world but not of the world" identity. Volf explains the ramifications of the Christian's identity through Paul,

What are the implications of the Pauline kind of universalism [Gal 3:28]? Each culture can retain its own cultural specificity; Christians need not "lose their cultural identity as Jew or Gentile and become one new humanity which is neither". At the same time, no culture can retain its own tribal deities; religion must be de-ethnicized so that ethnicity can be de-sacralized... Through faith one must "depart" from one's culture because the ultimate allegiance is given to God and God's Messiah who transcend every culture. And yet precisely because of the ultimate allegiance to God of *all* cultures and to Christ who offers his "body" as a home for all people, Christian children of Abraham can "depart" from their culture without having to leave it (in contrast to Abraham himself who had to leave his "country" and "kindred"). Departure is no longer a spatial category; it can take place *within the cultural space one inhabits*.<sup>12</sup>

To see this in light of the "in the world but not of the world" schema, we can say

Christians do not depart from the world in order to be Christians, but rather maintain their

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<sup>10</sup> Volf here uses the term Paul's universalism. I do not believe this to mean that everyone is saved like how the word "universalist" in regards to soteriology can mean. Rather, I believe Volf is using the word in light of the unity or universality as expressed in Gal 3:28, "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

<sup>11</sup> 1996 predates the New Perspective, but Volf's referencing of NT Wright in page 44 and discussion of Pauline theology as admission to a culture and cultural identity, if taken to be the only point of Galatians 3-4, can lose sight of the point and language of atonement that is found in that passage.

<sup>12</sup> Volf, 49.

earthly culture while simultaneously becoming part of a new culture because of the new allegiance to God and hence disavowing their old tribal deities.

The proper distance from a culture does not take Christians out of that culture. Christians are not the insiders who have taken flight to a new “Christian culture” and become outsiders to their own culture; rather when they have responded to the call of the Gospel they have stepped as it were, with one foot outside their own culture while with the other remaining firmly planted in it.<sup>13</sup>

Gospel then calls one out of his or her culture, and yet still preserves his or her connectedness to their old culture, except without its former tribal deities. Volf further explains the Christian identity by discussing the centering of the self.

Similar to Schrag’s assessment of postmodernism’s undetermined self from above, Volf discusses the centerless self that Richard Rorty and the rest of postmodernism proposes. Volf proposes a way to address “the ironic stance...[being] the posture of a centerless self”<sup>14</sup> by arguing for a centered self to show that there are right and wrong beliefs as well as right and wrong ways of going about weaving beliefs and desires. But Volf admits the danger of such argument because he would like to put the emphasis on not just the centered self, but *what* that center *is*. For that he turns to Paul again in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ; and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” For this verse, we see Paul’s understanding of the transition from a *wrongly* centered self to a *correctly* centered self.

According to Volf, the development of the self is the business of constantly producing its own center. Volf refers to psychologists to explain the struggle of people’s establishing of self identity:

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<sup>13</sup> Volf, 49.

<sup>14</sup> Volf, 69.

Psychologists tell us that humans produce and reconfigure themselves by a process of identifying with others and rejecting them, by repressing drives and desires, by interjecting and projecting images of the self and the other, by externalizing fears, by fabricating enemies and suffering animosities, by forming allegiances and breaking them up, by loving and hating, by seeking to dominate and letting themselves be dominated – and all this not neatly divided but all mixed up with “virtues” often riding on hidden “vices,” and “vices” seeking compensatory redemption in contrived “virtues.”<sup>15</sup>

This complex process of reinventing the center of one’s self, wherever it may lead you, is ultimately what needs to be de-centered. Paul’s, “I have been crucified with Christ” is speaking of how that old center is to be de-centered and then re-centered upon Christ. Volf argues that this process happens at the same time through faith and baptism (Romans 6:4)<sup>16</sup>. It could be argued then that the self no longer exists! For this is just a phantom of what existed before. However, in this crucifying of the self, the original self is still preserved; it does not dissolve into Christ as if the old self disappears. Volf explains that the latter half of the verse clearly states Paul saying, “the life *I* live in the body *I* live by faith”. So Paul’s self identity of who he is is still preserved. Volf sums up the process in this way,

Re-centering entails no self-obliterating denial of the self that dissolves the self in Christ and therefore legitimizes other dissolutions in the “father,” the “husband,” the “nation,” the “church,” and the like. To the contrary, re-centering establishes the most proper and unassailable center that allows the self to stand over against persons and institutions which may threaten to smother it.<sup>17</sup>

So although Volf is making the case of the self in light of conflict and struggle, in light of how people are excluded and ought to be embraced, from his treatise, we can see that the Christian’s identity must be found in Christ. And this identity is centered on Christ, located, “not in some single and unchangeable – because self-enclosed – ‘essence,’ but in

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<sup>15</sup> Volf, 69-70.

<sup>16</sup> “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

<sup>17</sup> Volf, 71.

self-giving love made possible by and patterned on the suffering Messiah.”<sup>18</sup> Also, in light of this identity, then, Christians have the unique ability (and task) to embrace those who are excluded and wronged by embracing them like how Christ embraced sinners, “God’s reception of hostile humanity into divine communion is a model for how human beings should relate to the other...[This idea is explicated by] analyzing ‘repentance’, ‘forgiveness’, ‘making space in oneself for the other,’ and ‘healing of memory’ as essential moments in the movement from exclusion to embrace.”<sup>19</sup> This act of embracing then is a cultural activity that Christians also must participate in, which then helps the Christian solidify who he/she is as one “called out.”

#### Confessionally Formed (in Discourse)

To have our identity confessionally formed is when a dialogue between the present and the past occurs. With the postmodern thrust for the hegemony of the local, a thirst for community has sprung up in postmoderns. To show how this sense of community can arise, we begin the dialogue of the present and the past by introducing the modern marketing medium to the Heidelberg Catechism. The postmodern suspicion of inevitable progress also allows for the old confession to open up passageways into finding a deeper rootedness for finding our identity.

“New and improved” is the slogan of many products in the consumer’s world. This consumer mentality not only applies to products but to almost every area of our lives. So the average person automatically assumes that newer is better. This is a result of

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<sup>18</sup> Volf, 71.

<sup>19</sup> Volf, 100.



modernism, which has promoted the idea that progress is inevitable and that there is nothing that cannot be accomplished if humanity puts its mind and strength to it.<sup>20</sup> C.S. Lewis and Owen Barfield have called this chronological snobbery. The chronological snob thinks, “Surely, people from the past could not in anyway have known what we know now. We have evolved and progressed much further than them!” So there exists a disregard of the past and an elevating of the future. As a result of this, then, we lose sight of great traditions like the Heidelberg Catechism.<sup>21</sup> When we lose touch with the past, then we forget why certain practices are done. Ask the average church goer why the Apostle’s Creed is recited, and you will most probably receive a blank stare or a comment “because we’ve always done it”. But ask about why the church should bring in a Starbuck’s into the church or install a new powerpoint system, and you will get more intelligent reasons. Are we then stuck with “out with the old and in with the new?” This would not be an acceptable answer.

Of all the confusion and concern that postmodernism has introduced for the Christian church, in regards to appreciating the old, postmodernism provides an invaluable opportunity. Postmodernism’s suspicion of modernism’s inevitable progress is the key. No longer do postmoderns automatically accept inevitable progress. No longer do they automatically accept that the new way is the best way. If anything, postmodernism has caused people to be more open to different points of views.<sup>22</sup> This then, is the opportunity to turn people’s attentions back to the traditions that have been

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<sup>20</sup> Genesis 11:6 seems to be the misinterpreted proof text for this. However, I believe that this verse is less of God’s fear of man’s potential for progress, but more of God’s concern of man’s potential for exponential rebellion and wickedness.

<sup>21</sup> Hereafter HC.

<sup>22</sup> Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 12.

tried and tested. Frederica Mathewes-Green also uses this approach in advocating for the Christian faith to Greek Orthodoxy:

What you can catch in a sieve, what has stayed strong through so many cultures over so much time, is reliable truth, the presence of the Holy Spirit. Of course, most Christians today hold to a reduced version of that view, recognizing in other believers at a minimum quality of being captured by the living, powerful presence of Christ. But there is a great deal more that we can access, which has already been “table tested” by a wide variety of cultures. We don’t have to settle for the lowest common denominator. We don’t have to make up new stuff because what we made up a decade ago is starting to feel lame.<sup>23</sup>

Although Greek Orthodoxy has questionable theological stances on atonement, the approach of connecting to “table tested” truths and practices is an important approach. So let us then highlight those elements of the HC that are applicable and helpful to a postmodern generation.

### **Resonations with Postmodernism**

Question 1 of the HC states that the only comfort in life and in death is the certainty that one belongs to Jesus Christ. The sense of belonging is one of the biggest needs of people today. People turn to various types of communities, even a cyber-community, in search of belonging. And so the HC from the beginning tells the catechized that they belong. Here is a community that can offer true comfort, both in this life and the next. Furthermore, this community is one that is sure. “I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in truth faith. And of this community I am and always will be a

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<sup>23</sup> Frederica Mathewes-Green, “Frederica Mathewes-Green’s Rejoinder,” in *The Church in Emerging Culture*, ed. Leonard Sweet (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 183.

living member.”<sup>24</sup> It is this type of assurance that will resonate in the hearts of people today; a belonging that identifies you with something bigger than yourself and one that is timeless. There is also another element of the HC that resonates with the postmodern generation.

The HC gives us a hard, honest look at humanity’s imperfection. This then attests to postmodernism’s suspicion of the great optimistic movement of progress (the machine of modernity). Questions 3-11 of the HC is titled “Human Misery”. However, such a bleak look at humanity is not the full picture of Christianity. The HC clearly unfolds the hope that is found in Christ through the Gospel. So optimism is made more real because of a raw look at the current situation and a real exposition of the hope found in the person and work of Christ, the plan of the Father, and the administering of the Holy Spirit. This “real” optimism then anchors one’s identity as a true sinner but with real hope of redemption.

### **Explanation of the Christian Tenets**

Rather than simply saying, do this because we have always done it, the HC offers biblical reasons for each Christian tenet. This is an important tool for a generation that demands reasons for doing something since they are more characterized by praxis than principles. Every answer (all 129 of them) provides a footnote of biblical passages that validate what is being said. And for some of those purists who believe that certain truths are legitimate if only directly from the source, the HC provides for them as well. In the question of baptism, Q&A 71 tells us that the principle of baptism itself is affirmed by

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<sup>24</sup> Heidelberg Catechism Answer 54.

the very words of Christ. This then is not simply a call back to tradition. It is a return to tradition with a thoughtful approach through the basics of Christianity. Now, parishioners will understand why the Apostle's Creed, the Decalogue, and the Lord's Prayer are important and applicable to today's faith. More than simply a practice because it was handed down through the years, the HC provides the reasoning and biblical reasons for doing them. As people today practice these things, the echoes from the past explaining the reasons for these practices continue the conversation of Christian identity through the ages. And so this dialogue between the contemporary and the past helps form an identity that is robust for postmodern generations. That is why the HC is helpful and relevant to postmodern Christians today because it helps find an identity rooted in the past, which in turn makes their identity more sure and sturdy.

#### Identity Built Through Generations (in Community)

Finding a rooted identity in the past also finds its formation in his or her community. And it is within that community that identity is found when it is modeled to one another as peers and particularly as older members to younger members. This generational connection in understanding identity is vital for the faithful transmission of the sojourner identity within the church community. Also, making these generational ties resonates with the postmodern inclination for wanting to be connected. So then Gary Parrett and Steve Kang's work in *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful*, argues for the shaping of the faith identity of the young in the church via generational modeling. In a postmodern context the community building and the connectedness through the

generations of this argument is the perfect tool to develop a faith identity. So let us take a brief, closer look at their book.

Authors Parrett and Kang explore the purpose of the church in the opening chapter. Amidst the thinking process of seeing why the church exists, why the church exists in this space and time, and what the church is to teach, a reminder of the church's responsibility to the next generation for faith is made in chapter 11. Parrett begins by surveying Old Testament texts to argue for the biblical mandate of passing on the faith from generation to generation.<sup>25</sup> Then Parrett explains the situation of the evangelical church today, of its mostly failing grade in applying this biblical truth. By falling into the trap of the cult of ageism,<sup>26</sup> churches are robbing young believers of benefiting from the rich resource of modeling, the learning that comes from observing adults during times of worship and practices of faith. In addition to the discussion of the Torah, Parrett's use of Psalm 78 is the most compelling. The reason for this is because of the two fold responsibility that Parrett explains, "This wisdom of Psalm 78 reminds us that we must teach both what God requires of us *and* [emphasis mine] what God has done for us."<sup>27</sup> Passing on the faith from generation to generation then becomes more than just a transmission of laws or instructions, but also the transmission of the testimony or story – that God does not simply write laws but also authors and acts in His divine drama. Or if we see it in the context of teaching the Gospel, passing on the faith to the next generation

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<sup>25</sup> In the preface of *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful*, Parrett and Kang explain that the content is largely from Parrett and that Kang's contributions are in chapters 8 and 9. Hence, Parrett will be attributed and addressed in this discussion of chapter 11.

<sup>26</sup> Gary Parrett and S. Steve Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church*, not yet published, 406.

<sup>27</sup> Parrett and Kang, 412.

is not only the letters of the law but also the acts of grace; for the Gospel is neither only law nor only grace, but its richness is fully seen only with a complete understanding of both elements. And thus it is the Gospel that is then passed on from generation to generation.

I would further add that this passing on of the faith is also confirmed in Paul's second letter to Timothy. 2 Timothy 1:5 reads, "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." Most people do not know that the names Lois and Eunice are bible names. It may be because they are only mentioned once in the bible, but here we see Paul making it a point to identify them by name. This acts, I believe, as homage to their faithful carrying out of the biblical mandate of passing the faith from generation to generation.<sup>28</sup> And this is an example of how the responsibility of passing on the faith from generation to generation goes even beyond a purely Jewish setting, because we know that although Timothy's mother is Jewish, his "father was a Greek."<sup>29</sup>

There is no doubt that this ministry strategy, of incorporating a conscious multi-generational reality into our worship and our church teaching, is biblical. And although this may be a practically challenging ministry strategy, it is absolutely important, particularly in today's ministering to postmodern generations. The passing on of the faith from generation to generation reflects the heritage of the faith, which combats the postmodernist's tendency for centerlessness and relativism. It also provides the story of the faith, which facilitates understanding in light of the postmodernist's penchant for

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<sup>28</sup> Deuteronomy 4, 6, and 11.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 16:1.

narratives. The Gospel narrative then is the best vehicle to convey the elements of law and grace to postmodern generations. And as the community of believers model this narrative to each other, particularly to the younger, young postmoderns can begin to shape their identity within the divine drama of redemption.

### **Forming a Sojourner Identity Biblically**

We now take a biblical look at how we are scripturally called to a sojourner identity. From here we will be able to see the biblical case for a sojourner identity and what understandings and elements are necessary in order to shape such an identity. So we will first turn to Apostle Peter, then to Apostle John, and then to the author of Hebrews.

#### **Chosen Strangers**

We mentioned in the introduction that Peter presents the immigrant nature of a Christian's identity in that we are in the world but not of the world. He reminds us in 1 Peter 2:9-12 that our citizenship or our peoplehood does not belong to the world, but belongs to God. The first section of the pericope explains the beautiful nature of our naturalization into God's kingdom. By His mercy and grace, God calls us out of darkness and into light, *His* light. Verse 10 explains that we were a people-less people who did not receive mercy. And thus it is by the mercy of God that we are made His people. The pitiable state of being a people-less people is poignantly illustrated in the 2004 film, "The Terminal" starring Tom Hanks. Tom Hanks' character, Viktor Navorski, becomes people-less at JFK airport when his country undergoes a coup de tat. Because

of that, Viktor's passport becomes useless, and he is left without a country. So Viktor is stuck in the airport terminal having to find ways to avoid getting deported and coming up with ways to find food and just survive. It is only until his country's government is restored that Viktor is allowed to leave the airport, visit his father's love of jazz, and return back to his country. The pitiable picture of Viktor scrounging for quarters to try and buy food at the food court shows the merciless estate that verse 10 is describing. Thus the reality that now we are a people of God, led from darkness into His light ought to be our new found identity.

Peter then challenges the early Christians that, if we who were not a people and are now a people of God, then we ought to live within that new identity. So he reminds the Christians that they ought not to chase after the sinful desires that are from our past identity (v. 11). A lifestyle of pursuing sinful desires is not fitting of such identity. Instead, good lives are to be lived. And this is not just for the sake of being good, but rather it serves as a preparation of the day to come: the day where God would be glorified by pagans on the day of His visitation (v. 12 ESV). The preparation is one of witnessing to the reality of this good God who graciously draws a people-less people from darkness into His light as His people. So then life on this world is not lived with the purpose of chasing after sinful desires, but rather for this gracious God to be glorified by those who do not put their faith in Him because of the good works that is displayed by Christians, His people. In addition, verse 9 tells us that the purpose of our being made His people is to declare the praises of Him. So ultimately we are to praise God for His mercy and live such good lives so that others would praise Him too. For that sake then, Christians are to



live as strangers here on this world, because they are no longer strangers to God!<sup>30</sup> That is the wonder and beauty of the gospel and the very grounds of where we find our identity.

A final note on the phrase “aliens and strangers” is in order, however. There are Christian scholars that argue that such a phrase is not in reference to the sojourner identity of Christians. Instead, Peter’s use of the phrase was to address the persecuted Christians and describe their alien status in the Roman Empire, in light of their persecution. Scott McKnight in his commentary on 1 Peter argues that the phrase “aliens and strangers” is strictly in a political and sociological sense. He introduces J.H. Elliot as making a convincing case that such phrase was only in reference to the Christians’ immediate sociological condition, and not their spiritual pilgrimage. He further contends that understanding “aliens and strangers” as a spiritual metaphor is wrong and that Wayne Grudem (among many others) made an incorrect assessment of the phrase.<sup>31</sup> McKnight rightly qualifies his statement by saying that this does not mean that the New Testament is devoid of any pilgrimage metaphor<sup>32</sup> and even admits that Elliot leaves room for the phrase to still contain a metaphorical element of sojourning.<sup>33</sup> But McKnight sees an over-arching theme in 1 Peter of how Christians ought to interact with their immediate government<sup>34</sup> as these “resident aliens”, so it causes him to see the phrase as primarily a sociological description. McKnight is correct to see the overall

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<sup>30</sup> Or as Paul even describes: we are no longer enemies of God (Romans 5:10).

<sup>31</sup> Scott McKnight, *1 Peter: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 24, 125.

<sup>32</sup> McKnight 25.

<sup>33</sup> McKnight, 26.

<sup>34</sup> 1 Peter 2:13-17.

theme of Christians living in a persecuting government, but there is no need to devoid the understanding that these disenfranchised, persecuted Christians can bear it a little longer in order to find rest in their true home with their God. Let us take a look at four reasons why a spiritual metaphor of “aliens and strangers” can be maintained.

Firstly, it is true that the Christians of Peter’s letter were of alien status in the Roman Empire, but Peter’s explanation in verse 9 of their being made a people (not just as citizens from a socio-political stand point) brought out of darkness and into God’s wonderful light is not just a sociological explanation. That description has no political bearing. The move from darkness into light is very much a moral and spiritual one. So in light of this context, it is not too far fetched to understand Peter’s description of the Christians as aliens and strangers of the world to “abstain from sinful desires” as a spiritual reality of their pilgrimage as God’s people. Secondly, the exhortation to abstain from sinful desires is a moral one and not a socio-political one. So such a reminder to the early Christians does not only necessitate a sociological understanding of the phrase. Thirdly, why would Peter describe the oppressive Roman government as pagans in verse 12? There is a definite spiritual inference here in calling the others “pagans”. If Peter really was just interested in the sociological status of the persecuted Christians, he would have used a sociological description also of those who were persecuting them, ie. Persecutors, or Romans, or Civil Authorities, etc. Instead he uses a religious description of them as pagans, unbelievers. In other words, these Christians are aliens to their secular counterparts not only politically, but also spiritually because they are unbelievers. They do not believe in the same things and are not on the same spiritual journey as the Christians are. And finally, Peter’s reminder for the Christians to live good lives so that

the pagans would “glorify God on the day He visits us”, alludes to a very real eschatological reality. The day that God visits us has heavy reference to the day of judgment by God. Edmund Clowney explains, “The term ‘visitation’ in the Old Testament most often refers to God’s coming in judgment....in view of the emphasis that Peter puts on the coming of the judgment in the day of the Lord, it seems more likely that Peter is describing the day when every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”<sup>35</sup> The day of judgment is the consummation of God’s will for earth. It is the day when sojourners are finally home. So in light of Peter’s inclusion of the day of visitation, it is more than reasonable that “aliens and strangers” qualifies as a spiritual metaphor for the pilgrimage that Christians are on.

McKnight may have been concerned that with a spiritual understanding of “aliens and strangers” Christians then and today would somehow over-spiritualize their current status in this life and become completely oblivious to the social and political responsibilities that Christians have with the world that they live in. However, no such fear need to be had because, as discussed above, verse 12 clearly re-positions the Christian back to the physical reality that though they are aliens and strangers of *this* world, they are still called to interact with this world in a morally upright manner to the praise and glory of their God. If anything, it is the harsh reminder of the reality of life that we are not home yet. So until we get there, persevere and persevere well so that our actions would lead others to praise our Father in heaven.<sup>36</sup> So this is how an identity as a sojourner is lived here in the immediate context of this world (in it but not of it). We now

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<sup>35</sup> Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988), 104.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew 5:16.

turn to the first epistle of John to see an even stronger exhortation for Christians' identity as lovers of God versus lovers of the world.

### Lovers of the World vs. Lovers of God

In the first epistle of Apostle John, we see even stronger language than in Peter's epistle about an identity that should be foreign to the world and instead familiar with God. John writes emphatically that, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."<sup>37</sup> The very identity as a recipient of God's love is at stake here. Simply put, if you love the world then you are not associated with the love of God. So loving the world is a very serious affront to our relationship with God, which, as discussed above, is fundamental in the new identity as a Christian. So how can we understand this seemingly extreme exhortation? The point of focus is the object of that love. The object of our love *should* be God, but what does it mean then to love the *world*? And how does this affect our identity in God? For the sojourner identity, its understanding is that Christians live in this physical place, yet do not belong to it. John's use of the word world, *κοσμος*, does not only mean this physical place, however. A quick word study on *κοσμος* in the New Testament, reveals another dimension to this sojourner identity in addition to just the physicality of place. The identity as a people of God and not as a people of this world is not only the locality that the Christian is situated in but also the moral status of being. With John's use of *κοσμος*, we see an ontological locality, which then helps us see how loving the *world* does affect our identity. So let us take a closer look at *κοσμος*.

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<sup>37</sup> 1 John 2:15b.

BDAG defines *κοσμος* as 1. the physical earth 2. people, mankind 3. the universe 4. the habitation of humanity 5. morally speaking, mankind as alienated from God or unredeemed and hostile to God.<sup>38</sup> We can find examples of each of these five definitions in all of John's writings.<sup>39</sup> For the pericope of 1 John 2:15-17, the morally depraved sense of *κοσμος* is in use. This is clearly seen in the context of the passage since verse 16 defines "everything in the world" as "the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does."<sup>40</sup> Each description used is an example of a moral condition. So John's command to not love the world, does not mean that there should be no good works or concern for the welfare of the physical world or the people of the world. That would then contradict our discussion of 1 Peter 2:9-12 to live good lives among pagans. Instead what Christians should not love is the moral depravity that is so prevalent in the world and evident in its rebellion against its Creator. If you love the world in that sense, then you are aligning yourself ontologically with the hostility and rebellion against God. That fundamentally deconstructs the sojourner identity; so it only makes logical sense that if you are now identified as a people of God, you ought not to function or associate yourself with the ontological status of rebelling against God, hence "do not love the world." Furthermore, if we take this contextual understanding and revisit Peter's "not of this world" schema, we see that our identity, our being, is not just physically not of this world but also morally not of this world.

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<sup>38</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 561-562.

<sup>39</sup> John 1:10 (the universe); John 12:19 (people, mankind); John 16:21 (habitation of humanity); John 21:25 (physical earth); 1 John 5:19 (lost in sin, wholly at odds with anything divine, ruined and depraved).

<sup>40</sup> 1 John 2:16.

Verse 17 also points to an everlasting identity in the Father. The one who does the will of God lives forever, while the world and its will/desires pass away. This fact also points to our sojourner identity. If this world that we are in passes away, then that acts as a reminder that this world is not our home. As sojourners, Christians are to do the will of the Father to live forever with Him. They are not strive to try and live as long as possible and as comfortable as possible in this world. But to better illustrate that sojourner identity as a journey of faith through a world that is not our home and into a better world, our true home, let us now turn to the book of Hebrews.

### Nomadic Faith

In the Hall of Fame of Faith chapter of Hebrews, the author of Hebrews writes in chapter 11 verses 13-16:

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.<sup>41</sup>

What is striking about this passage is that these people of faith never received what they were waiting for but only welcomed it from a distance. That is incredible faith! And that faith then leads them to know their true identity as aliens and strangers on earth. They actually admitted that reality (v.13). So their life of faith then is what led them in preparation and longing for a “better country” (v.16), a better home. And in His faithfulness God prepares a city for them, their true home, the better heavenly country.

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<sup>41</sup> Hebrews 11:13-16.

This faith identity is what dictated how they lived and what they lived for. By faith, they knew that this world was not their home, and so they did not waste time chasing after the things of the world. Verses 35-38 even describe the level of persecution they received from the world for their faith: imprisonment, torture, flogging, jeering, stoning, death by sword, and even being sawn in half! Indeed the world was not worthy of such people of faith (v. 30)! Verse 39 further tells us that *none* of these people received what had been promised. They truly lived as sojourners of this world. They did not have to have their hope realized as they walked this earth, because the promise was good enough. And the reality of that promise, the hope of that truth, is what identified them not with this world, but with God's world. In order to highlight this faith reality let us take a closer look at the phrases "country of their own" or "homeland" in the English Standard Version (ESV) and "not ashamed to be called their God".

The Greek for "country of their own" or homeland, is πατρίδα. Verse 14 tells us that for someone to admit that they are aliens and strangers of this world, they are then claiming that what this world has to offer them does not suffice. They want something different. They want a country of their own. From the Greek we can see πατρίδα to be "fatherland". So this is not simply speaking of a physical territory. They wanted something with more substance than just land. The ESV translated it as "homeland" as the NIV translates it "country of their own", and both these translations get to the heart of these two facts, "this world is not their home" and "this world does not belong to them it belongs to others." Donald Guthrie explains πατρίδα as a very unique word in the New Testament and the Septuagint:

The word used is significant for it is rare in both the Septuagint and the New Testament. It means more than a place of habitation. It means a fatherland where the nation can find its roots. This was the desire of the patriarchs, and was a continuing motif for the people

of Israel throughout their history, although the writer of this epistle is thinking of it in spiritual rather than national terms.<sup>42</sup>

Seeking a fatherland speaks volumes of how these people of faith found their identity not within the boundaries of this world or the nations in it, but rather they knew that their true Father was calling them to His side. They knew that they were not a people of this world; their faith led them to believe and understand that. And so they sojourned through this world in search of their true home. Their identity was not defined by the boundaries of this world's nations and countries; rather it was defined by their relationship to their Lord, which led to a life that searched to be with their Father. And that leads us to the next phrase: "not ashamed to be called their God". Why would these sojourners journey to be with their Father? because of the covenantal relationship of "they will be my people, and I will be their God."<sup>43</sup> This promise was given to Abraham in Genesis 17:8, to Moses in Exodus 29:45, and the above referenced quote from Jeremiah. This biblical narrative of a sovereign God making a people-less people His<sup>44</sup> and declaring to be their God is a powerful relationship and *the* source of identity for Christians. God was not ashamed to be called the God of these people of faith, these sojourners who tarried through this life with the hope of being at home with their covenantal Lord. This is a powerful statement of the faith journey and an even more powerful biblical mandate for the sojourner identity that this treatise is arguing for postmodern Christians to take heed to.

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<sup>42</sup> Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 234.

<sup>43</sup> Jeremiah 24:7.

<sup>44</sup> See the discussion on 1 Peter 2:9-12 above.



## Conclusion

By using categories used by Calvin Schrag in his discussion of the self, we discussed three categories of how the Christian self is formed in a postmodern context. With the help of Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace* (identity formed theologically), the Heidelberg Catechism (identity formed in dialogue with the past), and Gary Parrett and Steve Kang's *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful* (identity formed in a generational community) we illustrated how the self's identity as a Christian in the postmodern context is formed. That identity namely points to a sojourner identity. And we looked to show the scriptural basis of such an argument through a quick study in the three epistles of Peter, John, and the author of Hebrews. But even with such a biblical warrant for having an identity as God's people sojourning through this world, we realize that the Christians of today are faced with an identity crisis, the crisis of forgetting their true identity and compromising their identity with things of this world. Let us then turn to our next chapter of Identity Crisis.

## CHAPTER 2

### IDENTITY CRISIS

For bicultural people, identity crisis is a very familiar topic. It is the conflict of figuring out who you are as you grow and interact in a society that is different from the home that you live in. Such identity crisis is not limited to ethnic categories either. I remember moving from the greater Los Angeles area to Philadelphia for college and feeling a sharp identity crisis on a regional level.<sup>1</sup> So identity crisis happens to anyone moving into a different culture (either ethnic or regional). The identity crisis that we want to discuss here, however, is not the crisis or conflict that occurs during identity formation or from the relocating of one coast to another. Rather, the crisis at issue here is that point when one begins to forget their true identity. This chapter will describe the crisis of Christians forgetting their otherworldly identity and explain why that leads to an unfulfilled Christian life.

#### **A Three Factor Crisis**

In order to describe the identity crisis at hand, I feel it is best described by considering three factors: the desire to blend in as a way of being “tolerant”, the idolatry of comfort and materialism, and being homeless by forgetting our true home and getting lost in our postmodern context. Tolerance is something that postmodernists have advocated and accused Christians of not having. Modern Christian thinkers have made the distinction between “modern tolerance”, which postmodernists advocate, and “classic

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<sup>1</sup> When I was at school, I was “so west coast”; and when I was at home for break I was “so east coast”. It got to the point where I felt I had to move to the Midwest to belong!

tolerance”. Gregory Koukl writes that “the modern definition of tolerance turns the classical formula for tolerance on its head: ‘Be egalitarian regarding ideas. Be elitist regarding persons.’ [instead of ‘Be egalitarian regarding persons. Be elitist regarding ideas.]]”<sup>2</sup> Koukl explains that modern tolerance is a trick used to silence dissenters from even speaking and that, in fact, modern tolerance is nonsensical. It is only with classical tolerance, which “involves three elements: (1) permitting or allowing (2) a conduct or point of view one disagrees with (3) while respecting the person in the process”<sup>3</sup> that true tolerance can exist. You have to *disagree* with someone in order to be tolerant of them. If all ideas are equal (because there is no absolute truthful idea, as most postmodernists would advocate), then you would never disagree with another person, and hence never have the need for tolerance. This insightful distinction aside, we unfortunately have a generation of Christians who are afraid to stick out as a Christian and would rather remain in the tolerable state of blending into the background. Jesus even tells us in John 15:18ff that the world would hate his disciples, and Paul tells us that living godly lives will inevitably lead to persecution.<sup>4</sup> This, however, does not seem to offer much assurance or serve as a reminder for our lifestyle as sojourners for 221 Korean American Christians between the ages of 18 to 35 years old that were surveyed in 2009.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gregory Koukl, “The Myth of Tolerance” *Christian Research Journal* 24, no. 4 (2002). <http://journal.equip.org/articles/the-myth-of-tolerance> (accessed January 7, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Koukl.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Timothy 3:12.

<sup>5</sup> 221 is the accurate number of people who took the survey; however, 185 people finished the entire survey, because they may have missed that there was a second page to the survey, which had questions 6-10.

## Blending In at the Cost of Identity

A total of nine churches: Calvary English Chapel (Wheeling, IL), Cerritos Presbyterian Church EM (Artesia, CA), City Light (Los Angeles, CA), Hope Chapel (Lutherville, MD), Jubilee Presbyterian Church Irvine (Irvine, CA), Jubilee Presbyterian Church (Conshohocken, PA), Korean Central Presbyterian Church EM (Daly City, CA), Living Faith Chapel (Los Angeles, CA), and New York Presbyterian Church EM (Long Island City, NY) were surveyed by using an online survey service ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)).<sup>6</sup> It was my hypothesis that 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean American Christians would not consider living differently from the ways of the world important because of their reaction to a legalistic or moralistic upbringing (whether by parents or by their home church). So in other words, the worldly and other-worldly distinction would not be evident in their lifestyles because they would consider other-worldly living as being prudish, and hence a lifestyle that blends into the world is how they would live.

## Results

The first two questions of the survey were to get the participant thinking about certain activities that are viewed differently by the world and by the church (ie. Is it okay to drink alcohol as a Christian that's 21 or over? & Is it okay for a Christian to live with someone of the opposite gender [not in a group, but one on one] before marriage?). In Tables 1 and 2 Questions 3-5 are listed as the number of answers provided for that choice

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<sup>6</sup> A sample of the survey can be found at this link:  
[http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=m3lYU\\_2bkGJhJZq1aS9EmzLw\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=m3lYU_2bkGJhJZq1aS9EmzLw_3d_3d)

from each church in alphabetical order (as listed above). Then those answers are written as percentages (in bold) of the total people who answered.

**Table 1. Survey Question #3 Results**

	Shouldn't	Enough to Understand	Enough to be Understood	Indistinguishable	Total
<b>Question 3</b> (how much should we contextualize?)	0, 1, 2, 0, 0, 2, 1, 0, 4 (10) <b>4.52%</b>	8, 3, 12, 11, 2, 8, 13, 7, 16 (80) <b>36.20%</b>	19, 10, 14, 15, 3, 8, 21, 9, 9 (108) <b>48.87%</b>	5, 1, 4, 1, 0, 2, 3, 6, 1 (23) <b>10.41%</b>	<b>221</b>

**Table 2. Survey Questions #4-5 Results**

	No	Yes	Total
<b>Question 4</b> (Should Christians be different from non-Christians?)	3, 0, 1, 0, 0, 3, 2, 2, 3 (14) <b>6.33%</b>	29, 15, 31, 27, 5, 17, 36, 20, 27 (207) <b>93.67%</b>	<b>221</b>
<b>Question 5</b> (Do you struggle with being in the world but not of the world?)	8, 3, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 2, 5 (29) <b>13.12%</b>	24, 12, 30, 24, 4, 18, 35, 20, 25 (192) <b>86.88%</b>	<b>221</b>

Questions 6-10 were to gather background information of any possible legalistic upbringing and its effect. Results of questions 7-9 (asking if they considered themselves, their parents, and the church they grew up in to be legalistic or not) are reported below:

**Table 3. Survey Questions #7-9 Results**

Legalistic?	No	Yes	Total
<b>Question 7</b> (You)	10, 8, 19, 12, 2, 10, 20, 17, 19 (117) <b>63.24%</b>	17, 4, 10, 10, 1, 4, 12, 4, 6 (68) <b>36.76%</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>Question 8</b> (parents)	12, 5, 13, 8, 1, 6, 17, 9, 11 (82) <b>44.32%</b>	15, 7, 16, 14, 2, 8, 15, 12, 14 (103) <b>55.68%</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>Question 9</b> (home-church)	6, 5, 10, 9, 2, 6, 11, 9, 4 (62) <b>33.51%</b>	21, 7, 19, 13, 1, 8, 21, 12, 21 (123) <b>66.49%</b>	<b>185</b>

The final question asked if they felt that either their parents or the church that they grew up in was legalistic, if that made them more conservative or less conservative in their lifestyle. The result, in the same format as above, is provided below:

**Table 4. Survey Question #10 Results**

	Less Conservative	More Conservative	Total
<b>Question 10</b> Did such an upbringing make you more or less conservative?	12, 3, 15, 5, 2, 5, 11, 5, 15 (73) <b>39.46%</b>	15, 9, 14, 17, 1, 9, 21, 16, 10 (112) <b>60.54%</b>	<b>185</b>

### Analysis

The majority of the participants felt they are supposed to be different from the world. And many of them struggle with it. They also answered that their lifestyle was more conservative because of their parents or church's legalistic attitude. So this seems to debunk my initial hypothesis. Below I present some explanations as to why the results did not come out as I had expected. The first reason is because of the research pool. The hypothesis would have been probably better researched if the test pool was 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean Americans who *no longer* attend church. So that is probably why the hypothesis did not show itself to be blatantly true from the results. Also the fact that the churches were all reformed Presbyterian churches may have accounted for the more conservative trend of answers. Non-Presbyterian churches were contacted and were sent a survey link; however, there were no responses to the survey request from those churches. Secondly, Question 3 provides a clue that the survey result does partially reflect the initial hypothesis.

Question 3 of the survey asked the question of how much should a Christian contextualize or relate to a non-Christian. Rather than the better answer of acculturating

to the world/non-Christians just enough for Christians to understand non-Christians,<sup>7</sup> nearly half (108)<sup>8</sup> picked “acculturating to the world/non-Christians enough for non-Christians to understand us.” I believe this is a reaction against conservative or legalistic upbringing the participants may have had in the past, out of fear of appearing too ascetic/monastic or even too prudish to non-Christians. These Christians would rather give up their own context and acculturate to another context so that they would be better understood, or essentially well received. So the majority were willing to involve themselves more with the ways of the world for the sake of non-Christians understanding them, probably for the purpose of evangelizing to them,<sup>9</sup> but also to avoid being viewed as an intolerant Christian. In their book, *Resident Aliens*, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon make a powerful statement against such acts of accommodation, particularly in doing theology and evangelism:

In Jesus we meet not a presentation of basic ideas about God, world, and humanity, but an invitation to join up, to become part of a movement, a people. By the very act of our modern theological attempts at translation, we have unconsciously *distorted the gospel* [emphasis mine] and transformed it into something it never claimed to be – ideas abstracted from Jesus, rather than Jesus with his people.<sup>10</sup>

Accommodating too much can potentially distort the gospel! This is Hauerwas and Willimon’s critique of modern theologians, epitomized by Paul Tillich.

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<sup>7</sup> I describe this as the better answer because of 1 John 3:1. Where, because the world does not know the Father, the world does not know us. So according to John, there ought to be a level of unfamiliarity as the world watches Christians.

<sup>8</sup> The question had a total of 4 choices. If you also add the number of people who chose the fourth choice of “acculturating until you are indistinguishable”, the desire to blend in is represented among 131 people (59% of the survey pool!).

<sup>9</sup> This is a common reason given to me by 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Korean American Christians.

<sup>10</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 21.

The evangelistic heart of wanting to accommodate to a non-Christian is very admirable and even seems biblical.<sup>11</sup> However, doing this at the cost of one's identity and becoming indistinguishable from the world is not true evangelism. Evangelism ought to be the invitation of others into the kingdom of Christ, not license for our immersion into the world. Already we can see how Christian principles become lost when Christians forget their true identity and start living as people that they are not. James K.A. Smith<sup>12</sup> comments on the lack of peculiarity Christians have as a people and encourage today's Christians to get back to some of their roots in order to restore that identity as Christians. Smith uses the movie, *Whale Rider*, to illustrate how a restoration of one's original identity, no matter how peculiar it may seem to contemporary practices or modern day living, is necessary for Christians in a postmodern world, "The church would do well by learning to ride whales. We need to be attentive and discerning about the way modernity has eroded our identity as the 'peculiar people' who make up the body of Christ and seek to retrieve the strange ways and ancient practices of the communion of the saints in order to re-form who we are."<sup>13</sup> Essentially, as a Christian, losing one's peculiarity by blending into the secular world is a losing of one's identity as a Christian. The call to return to a confessional faith as a means of restoring a sojourner identity was discussed in chapter 1. Furthermore, another factor that leads Christian postmodern generations to an identity crisis is the idolatry of comfort and materialism.

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19-22. Paul is not advocating complete abandonment of one's identity here, however. This will be further discussed in chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> Although his advocacy of Radical Orthodoxy blurs the supremacy and absolute truth of Scriptures, his call for Christians to return to a confessional faith is right hearted and a helpful challenge for Christians trying too much to blend into a postmodern society.

<sup>13</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 116.



## Storing Up Our Treasures in the Wrong Home

In the discussion of how the suburbs affect the spiritual vitality of Christians,<sup>14</sup> the idea of comfort in the suburbs is a major topic<sup>15</sup> – comfort can almost become an idol where it subjects everything under itself. This temptation is not surprising, however. It is a parent's duty to keep one's children as safe and as well provided for as possible. However, I believe that once comfort becomes *the* thing for a family or an individual, that Christian or Christian household is completely forgetting his/her identity. Let us take a look into the idolatry of comfort by turning to David Goetz's *Death by Suburb*.

Goetz describes something called the thicker life. This is a life that is deeper than just the comforts offered by suburbia. The danger of suburbia for Goetz is described as such, "...I can't shake the image of the inverse cripple with a bloated, tiny soul. Perhaps that's one of the effects of comfortable suburban living. Too much of the good life ends up being toxic, deforming us spiritually."<sup>16</sup> That deformed spirituality is what I would argue as losing one's spiritual identity as a sojourner. The deformity is such that only one part of our spiritual senses becomes so big that it becomes a detriment to the other senses, thus the allusion of Goetz to Friedrich Nietzsche's man with an oversized ear in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In this particular case, the spiritual sense that becomes deformed is the sense of sight. This kind of comfortable living distorts our vision. Goetz explains that the desire for comfort and the desire to accumulate things or accumulate

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<sup>14</sup> David Goetz, *Death by Suburb*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Youth Worker Journal, "Seeking God in the Suburbs: Interview with Al Hsu and Dave Goetz," *Youth Worker*. <http://www.youthworker.com/youth-ministry-resources-ideas/youth-culture-news/11554243/page-1/> (accessed January 7, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Goetz, 9.

status/prestige (which he calls “immortality symbols”) blinds us only to see a flat, one dimensional life. This type of life pursuit, or even life in suburbia, is what Goetz means by death by suburb. Our spiritual lives are at stake. Instead he argues for a thicker life that is described as:

A life lived well spiritually, it seems, is a life lived in the thickness – in the space beyond and including the three-dimensional form of the moment.... This much thicker world is a world in which I am alive to God and alive to others, a world in which what I don't yet own defines me. It's a higher existence, a plane where I am not the sum total of my house size, SUV, vacations, kids' report cards – and that which I still need to acquire.<sup>17</sup>

A thicker life is seeing the three dimensional reality around you and living in response to it. However, if the possessions of immortality symbols become the priority of one's life, Goetz inevitably says you will die spiritually. In his eight suggestions of how to live the thicker life, a healthy spiritual life in the suburbs, chapter 5 discusses how suffering must be a daily reality. He explains that life is hard. Suburbia's deception that life is supposed to be easy and comfortable is one of the biggest deterrents to our living a thicker life. So he recommends that Christians in suburbia learn to accept suffering. He explains, “There's no entrance into the thicker reality of Christ's presence without the cross. No one has to go looking for one; the cross finds you.”<sup>18</sup> Here Goetz obviously means the cross as suffering, an almost echoing of Christ's own call to pick up the cross and follow him.<sup>19</sup> But this suffering is not a masochistic one, but rather the road to peace in God. Goetz quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “It is good to learn early enough that suffering and God are not a contradiction but rather a unity, for the idea that God himself is suffering is one that has always been one of the most convincing teachings of Christianity. I think

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<sup>17</sup> Goetz, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Goetz, 89.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 14:27.

God is nearer to suffering than to happiness, and to find God in this way gives peace and rest and a strong and courageous heart.”<sup>20</sup> So definitely then, comfort *must not be* an idol that we pursue. Yet we find our Christian postmodern generation caught up in this idolatrous pursuit.

If we become so focused about making our lives here as comfortable as possible, we are forgetting that this world is not our home and that our home is with our covenant Lord. Our sojourner identity is forgotten, and then that leads us to investing our time and resources into perishable things rather than imperishable things. C.J. Mahaney calls this lifestyle “worldliness”. He defines it as “a love for this fallen world...More specifically, it is to gratify and exalt oneself to the exclusion of God.”<sup>21</sup> And in addition to the biblical reasons for not being worldly, Mahaney argues that, “we must fight worldliness because it dulls our affections for Christ and distracts our attention from Christ.”<sup>22</sup> Later on in the chapter of materialism written by Sovereign Grace Ministries pastor, Dave Harvey, the idolatry of comfort in material things is well described as, “The sin of covetousness is not that we have stuff; it’s that *our stuff has us*.”<sup>23</sup> Did not Jesus exhort us of the foolishness of storing treasures on earth in his Sermon on the Mount? We are to store our treasures in heaven, not on earth.<sup>24</sup> In fact Jesus describes that the treasures we invest into serves as litmus test of where our heart is.<sup>25</sup> And it is the proposition of this treatise that our

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<sup>20</sup> Goetz, 94.

<sup>21</sup> CJ Mahaney, *Worldliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 27.

<sup>22</sup> Mahaney, 35.

<sup>23</sup> Dave Harvey, “God, My Heart, and Stuff”, in *Worldliness*, ed. CJ Mahaney (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 96.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew 6:19-20.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 6:21.

sojourner identity will help us sort out where our hearts ought to lie – in God’s kingdom and not in the kingdom of this world. Apostle Paul continues to speak on the matter of where our heart is or where our hope lies in his letter to Colossae.

Paul writes in Colossians 1, “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints – the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel.”<sup>26</sup> Paul commends the Colossian Christians of the fruit of faith and love that comes from the hope that they have in heaven. The object of hope for the Colossian Christians was not found in their everyday lives or in the things of the world around them. Instead it was a hope that lied in heaven. Objective hope in heaven, kindles within us subjective hope that overflows into acts of love towards other people and faith in the author of our hope. And that is what made Paul so ecstatic in his prayers for the Church of Colossae. And so where does our hope come from? It comes from the word of truth, the gospel. The author of our hope is found in the word of truth about salvation. In the gospel we find what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross so that we can have real hope.

In light of this real hope, then, Paul exhorts the Colossian Christians in chapter 3 to set their minds on things above and not on earthly things.<sup>27</sup> And that shift in mindset and attitude is to be reinforced with their actions and lifestyle as Paul commands them to rid themselves of their earthly nature and to be clothed with godly nature.<sup>28</sup> The idolatry of comfort then, is being so worldly-minded that it distracts us from having our heart,

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<sup>26</sup> Colossians 1:3-5.

<sup>27</sup> Colossians 3:2.

<sup>28</sup> Colossians 3:5-14.

hope, and mind set on heaven.<sup>29</sup> Paul explains that such people are “enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.”<sup>30</sup> And by being worldly-minded, the identity crisis of Christian postmodern generations leads them to act in ways that are unfitting of their true identity.

### The Postmodern Homeless: Forgetting Our True Home

In the introduction, we saw from David Lyon’s discussion of postmodernism its centerlessness, thus making everything devoid of absolute meaning. In lines with this postmodern centerlessness, Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian Walsh, in their book *Beyond Homelessness*, write of the postmodern homelessness that plagues people today. They illustrate this reality through the book now turned movie, *Up in the Air*.<sup>31</sup> They quickly summarize how Ryan Bingham is a corporate employee of a consulting firm that essentially has an apartment for storage and lives from airplane to airport to hotel back to airport and airplane again. Essentially we meet the postmodern nomad, who refuses to buy into his realtor acquaintance’s mantra, “‘We all need a place to call our own. This is America. This is what we’re promised....,’ Ryan isn’t buying it. Not only does Ryan think that home ownership is not in his makeup, he also thinks that trying to find shelter in the ruins of America is little more than a bad joke.”<sup>32</sup> Homelessness does not only

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<sup>29</sup> See footnote 15 above.

<sup>30</sup> Philippians 3:18-19.

<sup>31</sup> Walter Kirn, *Up in the Air* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001) and *Up in the Air*, directed by Jason Reitman (Paramount, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 240.

happen with the lack of physical place, either. In referring to *American Beauty*,<sup>33</sup> it is pointed out that even with a suburban home and a consistent job, Lester Burnham battles the sense of meaninglessness and displacement: “the postmodern nomad stuck in the suburbs, stuck in a loveless and sexless marriage, and stuck in a well-paying yet meaningless job with the utter absence of community or home.”<sup>34</sup> To Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, this is the apt description of postmodern homelessness. So if you are centerless, you also become homeless. And the postmodern destruction of modernism’s optimism only makes the sense of home an elusive idea.

Bouma-Prediger and Walsh further their discussion by talking about a double homesickness. They quote Susan Stanford Friedman of how this phenomenon is found in Dorothy of the *The Wizard of Oz*, “First, she’s sick *of* home, her rage surrealistically embodied in the whirling tornado that transports her away from Kansas. Then, she’s sick *for* home, pining for the Kansas homestead intensified with each fantastical scene on the journey to Oz. She longs for home – but only after she fulfills her wish to leave it.”<sup>35</sup> But the journey back home is what ultimately shows the homelessness of the postmodern. “Like Dorothy, a postmodern culture recognizes the Emerald City to be a construct of modernity: we have all seen behind the curtain and know that the Wizard of Oz is a fake and that his shining technology cannot save us. But postmodernism has no mantra of return: there is no going home.”<sup>36</sup> This despair then is only solved it seems in consumerism. The idea of the postmodern tourist is a metaphor that Bouma-Prediger and

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<sup>33</sup> *American Beauty*, directed by Sam Mendes (Dreamworks, 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, 240.

<sup>35</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, 242.

<sup>36</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, 245.

Walsh use to describe how the despairing postmodern nomad finds some sense of peace.

They quote Zygmunt Bauman to explain what the postmodern tourist is:

It is the tourist's aesthetic capacity – his or her curiosity, need of amusement, will and ability to live through novel, pleasurable, and pleasurably novel experiences – which appears to possess a nearly total freedom of spacing the tourist's life-world; the kind of freedom which the vagabond, who depends on the rough realities of the visited places for his livelihood and who may only act to avoid displeasure by escaping, can only dream of.<sup>37</sup>

As a tourist, you can buy your way to at least a temporary utopia and continue the journey of collecting “pleasurably novel experiences” with each new city you travel to.

So essentially Bouma-Prediger and Walsh conclude how homelessness connects to consumerism, which ultimately supports globalism.

In Chapter 3 we argued that global capitalism is a homeless-making force in the lives of millions upon millions of people in the world. Now we conclude that postmodern homelessness is the unique shape that such homelessness takes in the affluent West and that much postmodern talk of difference, heterogeneity, migrancy, exile, nomadism, marginality, and the like functions to provide ideological legitimacy and comfort to the forces of global consumerism.<sup>38</sup>

So what is the third problem that we see in young postmodern Christians? As hinted above with their desire to blend in and their idolatry of comfort and materialism, we see those two things exemplified in the homelessness as explained above. Postmodern Christians are forgetting that they do have a home, a better home as described previously in our look at Hebrews 11. And in reaction to the despair of being homeless, homeless postmodern Christians are finding their solace not in the Christian hope of a heavenly home with their covenant God, but in the eternal pursuit of consumerism, to purchase their rest in the things they can acquire and own.

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<sup>37</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, 253.

<sup>38</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, 263.

The identity crisis that we find in Christian postmodern generations is identified in issues of wanting to blend in with the world around them in the name of “modern tolerance” and under the guise of evangelism, in an unhealthy storing up of treasures in this world because of an idolatry of comfort and materialism, and in getting caught up in the postmodern homelessness, which only leads to a misdirected life of consumerism. Such distractions prevent Christians from living out their true identity. Now let us see how a crisis of identity then leads to the crisis of a Christian life unfulfilled.

### **Crisis of Unfulfilled Identity**

The gospel is not simply how we as individuals get a ticket to heaven. It is much bigger than that and covers a lot more. So many Christian postmodern generations who lose their sight of their sojourner identity miss out on the whole of the gospel. They incorrectly think that the gospel starts and ends with them. It is in part reflective of the individualism that is so prevalent in American society,<sup>39</sup> which I like to illustrate as the fixation with “I”: iPhone, iPad, iPod, iMac, iThis, iThat, etc. Once they know that they have been saved, they think that it is simply smooth sailing into heaven.<sup>40</sup> But one of the humbling realities of our salvation is that it is not for our good or glory (although we clearly benefit from it), but rather it is all to the praise and glory of God! Paul reminds us in Ephesians 1:4-6 and Galatians 1:3-5:

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – *to the praise of his glorious grace* [emphasis]

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<sup>39</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Of course we are saved by grace and faith alone (see footnote 25); so this is *not* to say that anything more is added in order for one to enter into heaven, but this is to comment on the misunderstanding that we just return to our normal way of life after being saved.



mine], which he has freely given us in the One he loves.... Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Paul explains that all this calling and choosing in love from before time is not just for us to feel special and feel loved, but ultimately it is to the praise of God's glorious grace.

Paul says later, "that we...[were chosen and predestined] for the praise of his glory."<sup>41</sup> He

continues to explain in the doxology of the Galatians passage above that the giving of

Jesus for our sins was according to the will of God and to His eternal glory. So if we

understand that the gospel call is not just about us, but rather about God, we need to see

the bigger picture. Instead, those who forget their sojourner identity go into myopic

cruise control and think that it is the beginning of the end. But what needs to be

reminded is that gospel salvation of the individual is not the end, but just the beginning!

It is an invitation to play a part in the divine drama of redemption. Christians then

become advocates of the praise of God's glory to others who do not know that salvation,

those who are broken and hurting, desperately in need of redemption. As Christians with

a sojourner identity, we recognize that our citizenship is not of this world but of God's

kingdom. And as citizens of God's kingdom, we then have responsibilities to carry out

His kingdom work. Paul reminds us, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through

faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one

can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works,

which God prepared in advance for us to do."<sup>42</sup> That work is taking part in God's

redeeming of His people and His creation. A Christian life unfulfilled then is failing to

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<sup>41</sup> Ephesians 1:12.

<sup>42</sup> Ephesians 2:8-10.

play a part in God's awesome redemptive plan, which is not a fear of God's plan not coming to fruition, but the travesty that we are ultimately not living out what we are purposed to live!

There is a world out there that is suffering. They are in need of a share of the light of the Gospel and the love of Christ. Because of the entrance of sin in the world, it is prevented from knowing the shalom of God.<sup>43</sup> As Christian sojourners this is a kingdom work that we must all endeavor in. Bouma-Prediger and Walsh describe the Christian sojourner as such:

The sojourner is a homemaker, but a homemaker who is potentially on the move. And the homeland for which the sojourner yearns is not some other world, but this world redeemed and transfigured. The contrast is not ontological but eschatological. Because the kingdom of God is not yet realized in its fullness, the sojourner yearns for its consummation. And that is why Christian sojourners are aching visionaries who bear witness to and work for a future of shalom.<sup>44</sup>

This "homemaking" is what is missing when an identity crisis occurs for Christian postmodern generations. The reality is that postmodern Christians need to reach out to a group of postmoderns who are being changed by the economy around them: either as victims of economic greed and social laziness or as perpetuators of that trend into an ethics of efficiency.<sup>45</sup> So let us begin to describe those who are victims of economic greed and social laziness by discussing Jonathan Kozol's *Amazing Grace*, an almost antithetical juxtaposition to the above-discussed *Death by Suburb*.

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<sup>43</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 9.

<sup>44</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh, 297.

<sup>45</sup> Term I like to use to summarize page 50 of David Wells' *God in the Wasteland*, "Granting efficiency the value of an ultimate criterion." Or in his *Above all Earthly Powers*, page 36, "what is done better and faster must be right".

## Victimized and Hurting People Need Redemptive Grace

Kozol's book opened the eyes of its readers to the discrepancy between the rich and the poor and minorities and whites in neighboring congressional districts of New York City.<sup>46</sup> The victims of such discrepancies are the children. The lack of opportunities and the abundance of danger either steal the lives of these children or hurl them down the path of despair. What is the cause of this tragedy? It is the greed and laziness of society, which is illustrated when Kozol quotes a young man's definition of evil, "Evil exists....I believe that what the rich have done to the poor people in this city is something that a preacher could call evil. Somebody has power. Pretending that they don't so they don't need to use it to help people – that is my idea of evil."<sup>47</sup> And so because of this laziness and greed we see a people who are victimized and hurting.

This is not just an opinion of people who play the victim card either. The city actually tries to ignore the social problem and cover it up. Kozol's conversation with Gizelle Luke, the program director of a Catholic aid organization shows just how the city was doing that. Upon showing Kozol the view of the ghetto from the highway, Luke points out a building painted with pictures of window shades, curtains, and flowers that look almost like real middle class homes at first glance. Luke's explanation is:

The city had these murals painted on the walls...not for the people in the neighborhood – because they're facing the wrong way – but for tourists and commuters. The idea is that they mustn't be upset by knowing too much about the population here. It isn't enough that these people are sequestered. It's also important that their presence be disguised or 'sweetened.' The city did not repair the buildings so that kids who live around here could, in fact, *have* pretty rooms like those. Instead, they *painted* pretty rooms on the facades. It's an illusion.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Kozol, *Amazing Grace* (New York, NY: Crown Publishers, 1995) 3.

<sup>47</sup> Kozol, 23.

<sup>48</sup> Kozol, 31.

And the reality of this economic greed and social laziness is further demonstrated when a liberal columnist praises these traits as the crucial core of the city's character!

"All right," concedes Anne Roiphe, a columnist in the *New York Observer*. "Out there, someone is sleeping on a grate....and the emergency rooms are full of people..." Still, she says, "*cruelty is as natural to the city as fresh air is to the country* [emphasis mine]....I used to feel this cruelty was wrong, immoral....Now I don't know. *Maybe it's the fuel that powers the palace* [emphasis mine]." Encouraged by this state of mind, she says, "I like the wicked clink of glasses..., the chandeliers glinting against the dark....Cruelty is part of the energy, part of the delight....I want to...eat good food till the millennium....I am feeling full of nerve. Nerve is what you need to get through....What you must decide is that shame is bearable." The author, who calls herself "a cold old liberal" in search of a fur coat, may be right in calling cruelty "the fuel that powers the palace" of our satisfactions.<sup>49</sup>

So clearly, we have a people who are victimized and hurt by economic greed and social laziness. And so it is no wonder that their view of God is either an unwavering, desperate faith in God (even described as other-worldly by Kozol)<sup>50</sup> or a cynical view of His impotence.<sup>51</sup> In answer to this tragedy, there are those who rise up to help, either in the name of social justice or religion.<sup>52</sup> Thus this is testimony to the need these people have for grace. There are persons out there that are so lacking grace that it is heart wrenching just reading about it. These people are hurting and longing for grace from others, and if Christian postmodern generations fail to fulfill their Christian identity, much of God's kingdom work is missed.

Kozol is absolutely correct to point out that the lack of grace in parts of society (parts of America) is real and the need for our serious attention to this matter is urgent. His book is a gritty journey into the struggles of real people and an essential aid as a

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<sup>49</sup> Kozol, 114.

<sup>50</sup> Kozol, 103.

<sup>51</sup> Kozol, 23.

<sup>52</sup> Kozol, 78-82, 87.

description of the type of people Christian postmodern generations must help. Ironically, the very people that need to be reached are those who are more capable of understanding a sojourner identity. Because life in this broken world is so hard, the people of Kozol's book already see themselves as sojourners,

Then, in that silvery voice again that *seems to come out of a different place from where we are* [emphasis mine], she says, "God knows when somebody has suffered long enough. When it is enough, He takes us to His kingdom. In heaven there is no sickness. Here, there is sickness. In heaven there is love. Here, there is hate. On earth you grow old or else you die in pain. In heaven you are young forever."<sup>53</sup>

This longing for God's kingdom is what Christian postmodern generations are missing. The sojourner's longing is also reflected in the desire for the brokenness of this world to be mended, to find its full redemption, its shalom. Paul describes this in his epistle to the Romans,

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.<sup>54</sup>

Once again, our hope is to be in things of heaven and not on things of this world. If we forget our sojourner identity, how can we even relate with the Romans passage above? We would have become so accustomed to this world, that we would not know that there is something better than this world. And when we fail to realize our sojourner identity, then we fail to administer to a people who do know that there is something better and are longing with pains like childbirth to be liberated from the brokenness of a sinful world.

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<sup>53</sup> Kozol, 106.

<sup>54</sup> Romans 8:20-25.

Our salvation found in the gospel, then, is not so that we can pat ourselves on the back and say, “we’re safe!” but instead to go and be distributors of the message of redemption and sharers of the love of Christ. Hot topics like social justice and environmentalism will also take on new meaning for Christian postmodern generations. They will no longer be the liberal agenda of groups like PETA, Green Peace, or ACLU but real concerns of Christians who desire to be God’s faithful kingdom workers<sup>55</sup> – Christians with sojourner identities that desire for God’s “kingdom [to] come and ... will [to] be done on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>56</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Identity crisis is plaguing Christian postmodern generations today. It is making them lose sight of their goal as sojourners and instead leading them to chase after false goals like too much accommodation, the idolatry of comfort, and postmodern consumerism that is described as being a “postmodern tourist”. As we have just described the crisis of these Christians forgetting their sojourner identity and the ramifications it has on God’s Kingdom work, let us now continue the discussion by enumerating some biblical examples, important principles, and guidelines for how that sojourner identity is lived out.

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<sup>55</sup> Bouma-Prediger and Walsh’s *Beyond Homelessness* not only discusses postmodern homelessness, but offers powerful insights into the broad range of Christians’ work in environmentalism and social justice as Sojourner Christians.

<sup>56</sup> Matthew 6:10.

## CHAPTER 3

### IDENTITY LIVED OUT

In order to exhort Christian postmodern generations to a sojourner identity, we need to provide examples of what that would look like. We will begin with biblical examples, then a discussion on cultural theology, and then an exploration of culture-making as countercultural Christians in a secular world. Finally, in order to execute this type of culture-making as sojourners, we will conclude with a discussion on how dialoguing with a secular culture is possible and necessary as an important witnessing aspect of the sojourner identity.

#### **Biblical Examples**

In the first part of this chapter, we want to see how the bicultural life of Paul and the exilic life of Daniel was practiced in light of their identity as God's sojourning people. First let us turn to Paul.

#### **Paul: Moving Through and Bridging Cultures With Discipline**

The bicultural life of Paul is a common example referenced by immigrant Christians. They point to Paul's command of the Jewish culture as well as his surrounding Roman culture as a model of how immigrant Christians ought to live. We see Paul's knowledge of various cultures epitomized in his famous passage on cultural evangelism. He says in his first letter to the Church in Corinth:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law

(though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.<sup>1</sup>

Paul used his cultural savvies to be able to address many different types of people for the sake of the Gospel. It may appear at first that he laid down his identity in order to fit the identity of those he was addressing. Almost like a chameleon, Paul seems to advocate the changing of one's colors, an almost "the ends justify the means" approach to evangelism. However, it was mentioned in chapter 2 that evangelism at the cost of one's identity is not evangelism; for if you lose your own identity, just what is it that you are inviting the non-Christian to? Rather we see from the remaining verses of chapter 9 Paul's attitude towards evangelism. The point is highlighted in verse 27, "No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize."<sup>2</sup> He describes his evangelism as one training for a great race. His approach to evangelism, then, is not fluid and unabashedly accommodating. It is rather disciplined and a product of strict training. The ability to accommodate to a vast variety of people while still maintaining one's identity in Christ, then is only possible while under strict training. Paul beats his body so that *after* preaching to others, he is not *disqualified* for the prize. So his becoming weak to the weak, lawless to the lawless, a Jew to the Jews was not at the loss of his true identity. He had undergone strict training for the sake of not losing it. Henceforth, he is not disqualified for the prize after witnessing to the unbelievers. Later in this chapter, we will also see how Paul skillfully uses his communication skills (not just his personality skills as shown in this passage)

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:27.



to be able to witness to the listeners at Mars Hill without losing the message of the gospel. He relates the message to the listeners, but does not relate the contents for their listening pleasure. We know that he does not do that because in fact, the audience becomes offended by his message (but not offended by his delivery).

We can also attest to Paul's ability to accommodate to his audience well because of his bicultural upbringing, in addition to the above mentioned strict training. We know that Paul was a bicultural Christian. He was an ethnic Jew as well as a Roman citizen from Tarsus. This gave him particular insight into the bridging of two cultures, namely the Jewish Christians and the Greek Christians. Robert Goette and Mae Pyen Hong did an interesting study of correlating the cultural tensions of the Hebraic Jewish Christians and the Hellenistic Jewish Christians to that of the cultural tensions between the first and second generation Korean American members of the Korean American church. In the discussion they highlight Paul's role as a bridge between cultures. We know from Acts 7 that the Hellenistic Jewish Christian widows were being overlooked. This was quickly settled by appointing Hellenistic Jewish Christian spiritual leaders to oversee the distribution. Goette and Hong speculate that this was due to a lack of communication and insufficient knowledge of the needs of the Hellenistic Jewish Christians.<sup>3</sup> Besides the issue of a lack of communication, Goette and Hong continue to describe the tension as an issue of adhering to the Jewish ceremonial laws, for such was the cultural marker of the Jewish culture:

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Goette and Mae Pyen Hong, "A Theological Reflection on the Cultural Tensions Between First-Century Hebraic and Hellenistic Jewish Christians and Between Twentieth-Century First- and Second-Generation Korean American Christians" in *Korean Americans and Their Religions: Pilgrims and Missionaries from a Different Shore* ed. Ho-Youn Kwon, Kwang Chung Kim, and Stephen Warner (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 118.

The issue remained unresolved regarding Hellenistic Jewish Christians' adherence to the Law, which was still viewed by the Hebraic Jewish Christians as an integral part of the culture ... The Hellenistic Jews were still expected to maintain strict obedience to the Law for cultural purposes if not for spiritual ones. Abandoning the Law was akin to abolishing their ethnic identity.<sup>4</sup>

Goette and Hong explain that this issue was only remedied in the letter to Galatians by Paul, who in effect had a mastery of both Hebraic and Hellenistic cultures, acting as a bridge between the two cultures. Using his cultural bridging capabilities, Paul draws both cultures' attention to the theological ramification of law and faith.<sup>5</sup> He pointed to the freedom from the law that was in Christ (Galatians 5:2-6), which was implemented for the Gentiles, and still wisely expressed the need to adapt to whatever cultural environment he was involved with in order to more effectively share the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:20-23). Paul also lived out this example as well. Goette and Hong write, "Paul defused the tensions while in Jerusalem and exemplified his freedom to adapt to any culture by participating in a traditional Jewish ritual."<sup>6</sup> And so Goette and Hong look to Paul as the cultural bridge example for the first and second generation Korean Americans today.

Goette and Hong stress the important theological aspects that are represented in the cultural tension. They first correlate the first generation Korean American Christian to the Hebraic Jewish Christians. They feel that the heavy adherence to the previous culture is shared by both groups. Similarly, the second generation Korean American Christians are correlated to the Hellenistic Jewish Christians. The ability of both these groups to have entered a new culture and assimilated to it is the common trait shared. On

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<sup>4</sup> Goette and Hong, 119.

<sup>5</sup> Goette and Hong consider this to be culture and faith, because they equate Law in this instance to mean the same thing as Jewish culture, as explained above.

<sup>6</sup> Goette and Hong, 120.

theological grounds, Goette and Hong then warn against a stringent adherence to past culture, for them, meaning the Law. They explain,

The apostle Paul argued that to be truly Jewish is not a matter of cultural adherence (Romans 2:28-29). Of ultimate importance was that one have the same faith as that of Abraham whether or not one adheres to the culture (Romans 4:12,16). Likewise, for second generation Korean Americans, if Korean cultural adherence is achieved without the transference of a living faith in Christ Jesus, what is of ultimate importance has been *missed* [emphasis mine].<sup>7</sup>

Thus for Goette and Hong, faith supersedes culture.<sup>8</sup> They point to something that is more important than culture, which is faith and the real reason of the church.<sup>9</sup> And so through Paul's example, we see that he is able to freely interweave between Jewish and Hellenistic cultures, because his focus was not so much the culture itself, but the theology of faith that centralizes his activities. In other words, his identity of faith as a citizen of God's kingdom first, is the basis that anchors Paul through his various cultural encounters and journeys.

Let us now turn to the exilic life of Daniel and how his identity as a vassal of YHWH guides him in his service of the exilic kings.

### Daniel: Yahweh is My Suzerain King

We want to take a look at Daniel 1 as a case study and a biblical study towards how Daniel and his friends did the balancing act as described by Apostle Peter in our introduction. Without being a formal exegetical paper, we will use exegetical elements for this discussion. Ultimately, we want to consider as much as the text will allow why Daniel decided to abstain from the king's portion of food and wine (in apparent

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<sup>7</sup> Goette and Hong, 121.

<sup>8</sup> Goette and Hong, 120.

<sup>9</sup> Goette and Hong, 122.

accordance with Mosaic dietary laws)<sup>10</sup> but chose to study the language and literature of the Babylonians, which was full of sorcery and divination prohibited by Mosaic law.

Then we will propose that Daniel's choice was a wisdom issue that had very much to do with his identity as a citizen of God's kingdom and with establishing that identity in a foreign land. The Christian dichotomy set forth by the Petrine passage will also serve to help us understand and act as a paradigm to categorize Daniel's decisions as well. And finally, we will try to glean principles of praxis for today's aliens and strangers *in* the world.

### **A Relatable Setting**

We find Daniel and his friends in a context aptly described (though anachronistically) by the Petrine passage above. As exiles of Israel, Daniel and his friends are in Babylon, displaced from their home to a new "home". They are not of the world of the Babylonians but they are definitely in the world of the Babylonians. The opening verses of Daniel 1 show us how exiled Israel is acculturated. The cream of the crop are gathered and brought into the palace. Then they are taught the language and literature of the Babylonians in anticipation of serving the king in his court. Rather than an act of generosity by the king, there were obvious intentions of controlling Israel through these young men.<sup>11</sup> And to further process the transformation, they are all given new Babylonian names. Anthropologists say that language and even names are markers of one's culture. So then the learning of a new language and the changing of one's name are fundamental elements of changing one's identity into a new culture.

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<sup>10</sup> We will argue that although that may appear to be the case at first glance, that was not the issue.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Daniel I* (Chapters 1-6) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 23, 25.

Of course it is not done as systematically as the Babylonians did, but nevertheless today's Christians are inculcated with a culture that is not Christian but rather its opposite. And it is the language and literature of the times that slowly and subtly transform our identity to one that is of the world rather than other-worldly. To most Christians today, however, language and literature seem culturally neutral. There would not be a second thought of considering how influential or acculturating language and literature is. So it would then be easy to think it was not a big deal for Daniel and his friends to learn the language and literature of the Babylonians. But a look at the text shows a less harmless implication of freely learning the language and literature of the Babylonians. In fact, a look at the Hebrew text will show that this act was not culturally neutral or even morally neutral. So not only does this encourage today's Christians to reconsider the apparent neutrality of language and literature for them today, but it also raises the very question of why Daniel willingly chose to study the language and literature of the Babylonians. So let us take a look at what the "language and literature of the Babylonians" would have meant to the Hebrew reader.

### **Literature and Language of the Chaldeans**

The NIV translation provides the quick geographic translation of verse 2 as Babylon. However, in the Hebrew, the setting is not simply described as Babylon, but rather "the land of Shinar" (אֶרֶץ-שִׁנְעָר). A quick search of Shinar in the Old Testament shows that this is the same location of the infamous tower of Babel. What are the implications of this? First, describing this place as "the land of Shinar" is a "deliberate archaism...Shinar, site of the tower of Babel, was synonymous with opposition to God; it

was the place where wickedness was at home<sup>12</sup> and uprightness could expect opposition.”<sup>13</sup> This place also symbolizes the whole moral nature of language. Language here was a punishment for the encroachment upon the throne/reign of God. So it would be difficult to imagine that the readers of the book of Daniel and Daniel himself would think that learning the *language* of the land of Shinar was morally neutral. The author of Daniel, then, is making a clear statement of what is implied in learning the language of the land of Shinar. There is another element in the text that shows that the language and literature is not neutral.

The NIV translation once again provides a quick translation of the ethnic group in verse 4 as Babylon. However, in the Hebrew, the ethnic group is described as the “Chaldeans” (כַּשְׁדִּיִּם). “It is true that Chaldea, mentioned as the tribe in control of Babylonia, is another name for Babylon. However, it soon became a byword for ‘magician’ or ‘diviner,’ since the culture was so closely associated with this practice.”<sup>14</sup> So then to learn the language and literature of the Chaldeans was synonymous to learning the language and literature of divination and sorcery. True, there were other elements to the language and literature of the Chaldeans: “the accumulated literature included omens, magic incantations, prayer and hymns, myths and legends, *scientific formulae for skills such as glass-making, mathematics and astrology* [emphasis mine].”<sup>15</sup> But what the Chaldeans were best known for and what was the regular practice of ancient

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<sup>12</sup> Zechariah 5:11.

<sup>13</sup> Joyce Baldwin, *Daniel* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1978), 78.

<sup>14</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 50.

<sup>15</sup> Baldwin, 80.

Mesopotamia was the art of divination.<sup>16</sup> Contrasted to this is the Mosaic law, which is all too clear in regards to the practice of sorcery and divination,

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you.<sup>17</sup>

So then for Daniel and his friends language and literature is not morally neutral, and we also know that the main content of the literature is deemed detestable to the Lord. So why did Daniel choose to go ahead and learn the language and literature of the Chaldeans? In order to answer this question, we need to explore the other moral issue in our text – an issue where Daniel actually decides to abstain himself from it.

### **The King's Delicacies**

As part of the acculturation of the young exiled men, they were not only offered the best academics, but they were also offered the best food and drink as well. And the best food and drink was from the king's portions. The Hebrew word for that is "פֶּתֶיִךְ" which literally means "portion for the king" or "king's delicacies". In contrast to his response about learning the language and literature of the Chaldeans, Daniel's response to the king's delicacies is adamant abstinence. In fact, eating of the king's table is a very moral issue for him, for he "resolved not to *defile* [emphasis mine] himself with the royal food and wine."<sup>18</sup> The very fact that Daniel thinks of eating the king's delicacies as defilement, makes this a moral issue. TWOT defines (נָאֵל) as "defile, pollute" and also

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<sup>16</sup> Longman, 50.

<sup>17</sup> Deuteronomy 18:10-12.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel 1:8.

explains that in its old testament occurrence “the pollution specified is from any breach of moral or ceremonial law.”<sup>19</sup> So then the questions that arise are why is eating the king’s delicacies a violation and what law was it violating?

Many scholars have wrestled with these questions. And before we can tackle our own question about Daniel’s response, the question of what the violation was needs to be addressed. But there is no easy answer. Some have explained it as Daniel’s desire to keep kosher, since there was no guarantee that the meat was prepared and handled properly and since there was no guarantee that the right types of meat would be offered (pork was highly prized in Babylon<sup>20</sup>). But then the next question is why abstain from the wine, for there are no ceremonial dietary laws that required refraining from wine (unless you are a Nazarite).<sup>21</sup> Thus kosher laws do not seem to be the issue. Other scholars have also explained that Daniel’s aversion towards the food was because it was probably offered to idols.<sup>22</sup> However, although possible, this seems to be more of an anachronistic issue from the Corinthian church<sup>23</sup> being superimposed onto Daniel’s time because there is no other immediate textual reference or evidence in the book of Daniel for such a case. Furthermore, if food offered to idols was the issue, vegetables (and not just meat and drink) would have been offered to idols as well.<sup>24</sup> However, Daniel willingly chose and asked for vegetables in his diet. So the idol issue is not too convincing. There is also the matter of Daniel’s abstinence not being a practice of permanence, “The diet of vegetables

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<sup>19</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* Vol 1. (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), #301.

<sup>20</sup> Baldwin, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Longman, 52.

<sup>22</sup> D.S. Russell, *Daniel* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1981), 26.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Corinthians 8.

<sup>24</sup> Longman, 52.



was a temporary regimen, as we learn from later texts that imply that Daniel at least enjoyed rich foods later in life.”<sup>25</sup> Daniel 10:3 infers that Daniel’s regular diet at the time of his troubling visions was that of choice meat and wine.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Daniel does not appear to be making issue of upholding dietary laws. Calvin even noted how there were no such scruples for Joseph when he was in Egypt.<sup>27</sup> So what other option is there?

W.S. Towner makes a very helpful point about what partaking of the king’s portion represented. In conjunction with Joyce Baldwin’s commentary on Daniel, Towner references Daniel 11:26 (the only other instance of פִּתְּבֵנִי outside of Daniel 1), in which sharing “the king’s board also [meant] entering into a covenantal relationship with him.”<sup>28</sup> This sheds light onto Daniel’s moral concern with eating the king’s delicacies.

It would seem that Daniel rejected this symbol of dependence on the king because he wished to be free to fulfill his primary obligations to the God he served. The defilement he feared was not so much a ritual as a moral defilement, arising from the subtle flattery of gifts and favours which entailed hidden implications of loyal support, however dubious the king’s future policies might prove to be.<sup>29</sup>

Daniel’s only king must be God and God alone, and that allegiance needed to be demonstrated. Especially in light of the acculturation that was happening, Daniel wanted to make it clear that his identity as God’s citizen was still maintained.<sup>30</sup> God was not just

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<sup>25</sup> Longman, 53.

<sup>26</sup> Longman, 53. Longman derives this from Calvin’s voicing of the critics of Daniel as hypocritical (Calvin, 30).

<sup>27</sup> Calvin, 30.

<sup>28</sup> W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1984), 25.

<sup>29</sup> Baldwin, 83.

<sup>30</sup> Longman disagrees with this point of maintaining allegiance because he argues that this act of abstinence was private and not public (Longman, 53). We would argue, however, that public or private is a non-issue. For whether it is for others to witness it or just for himself to know or even for him to remind his three friends, the issue of maintaining one’s identity as God’s subject, we believe, is very much at play here.

his God, but also his King. To further support this, we note the official's reluctance to comply with Daniel's request to abstain from the king's delicacies (Daniel 1:10), "The reluctance of the sympathetic chief of the eunuchs to comply with the request is all the more understandable if Daniel's motive was to remain free from commitment to the will of the king. Nebuchadnezzar would certainly have interpreted the motive as treasonable and have held Ashpenaz guilty of complicity."<sup>31</sup> Therefore, for Daniel, this act of defilement was a matter of moral law rather than ceremonial law (Mosaic dietary laws).

Then what was the moral law that Daniel did not want to violate? Scholars do not clearly answer this question, but we would propose that the law in mind is the first commandment of the Decalogue, "you shall have no other gods before me."<sup>32</sup> How could this law be the one in question if Daniel's issue is about allegiance to a king and not a deity? Meredith Kline's treatment of the Decalogue as a suzerain treaty is helpful here. The ancient near east practice of a suzerain king establishing his rule over a vassal king is the historical context of the Decalogue. Kline helpfully showed that the Decalogue then, was an act of accommodation on God's part: His using of means that the Israelites would relate to and be familiar with and His providing a deeper understanding for the Israelites' comprehension of their relationship with Him. For the Israelites would have understood that God's interaction with them in this suzerain-treaty-like document was more than just deity to mankind but also as king to his subjects. So it would not be too far of a stretch to see that Daniel would have a moral issue of being in allegiance or in "covenant relationship" with King Nebuchadnezzar, which would conflict with his covenant relationship with his true suzerain King. Therefore, we would argue that the moral law at

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<sup>31</sup> Baldwin, 83.

<sup>32</sup> Exodus 20:3, Deuteronomy 5:7.

play is the first commandment of the Decalogue; and like a faithful subject, Daniel was going to uphold that law and be faithful to that covenantal relationship. Then if we are to locate Daniel's choice in this matter on the dichotomy of the Christian according to the Petrine passage above, Daniel is establishing and confirming his "alien and stranger"-ness or his "in the world (of the Babylonians) but not of it" status. Now that we understand Daniel's response to the king's delicacies as moral restraint, let us revisit the question of Daniel's learning the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

### **Pupil vs. Practitioner**

After finding that the language and literature of the Chaldeans was not culturally or morally neutral in content, a moral response like the one above was expected. But just as the issue of abstaining from the king's delicacies was not a simple issue about ceremonial dietary practices, the question of why Daniel chose to study the language and literature of the Chaldeans is just as complex. First of all, there are not too many scholars who ask this question. For most it seems to be a non-issue. They all mention it, but do not see the same moral dilemma as presented. But there are three scholars who do raise the question and address it; so let us then take a look at what they say. Calvin suggests that since the Chaldeans were also good mathematicians and good astronomers, Daniel and his friends would have (with discernment) delved only in these subjects, while simply glossing over the abominable practices of sorcery and divination.<sup>33</sup> Longman says that this probably was not the case. "The bottom line is that the text is telling us that Daniel was educated in the ways of Babylon, which surely included these mantic arts. As

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<sup>33</sup> Calvin, 26-27.

we will see, he not only took the class, he graduated summa cum laude (1:17,20)!”<sup>34</sup>

Someone who graduates summa cum laude from his studies surely did not gloss over the subjects. Longman further comments on Calvin’s commentary by saying, “it is too facile to say that Daniel had nothing to do with this kind of wisdom”<sup>35</sup> and argues that for even Joseph, who had associations with Pharaoh’s divination cup<sup>36</sup>, this was not a cause for abstinence.<sup>37</sup> Rather, this was an opportunity to engage their surrounding culture by contrasting the wisdom/literature of the prevailing world against God’s wisdom/literature and showing that God’s wisdom/literature was better.<sup>38</sup> Baldwin also points out that whatever the moral dilemma, it is important to note these boys were firmly grounded in the word of God (thanks to Jeremiah et al.) before they engaged in learning the language and literature of their enemy,

The writer of Daniel implies no objection to the study of a polytheistic literature in which magic, sorcery, charms and astrology played a prominent part, those these had long been banned in Israel. These young men from Jerusalem’s court needed to be secure in their knowledge of Yahweh to be able to study this literature objectively without allowing it to undermine their faith. Evidently the work of Jeremiah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk had not been in vain.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to these three scholars’ comments, we consider that learning something (even thoroughly) and practicing it are two different things. Whenever Daniel successfully seems to practice the mantic arts, the text attributes the source and provider of that information to God and not to their Babylonian studies.<sup>40</sup> So technically, although Daniel

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<sup>34</sup> Longman, 50.

<sup>35</sup> Longman, 55.

<sup>36</sup> Genesis 44:5.

<sup>37</sup> Longman, 55.

<sup>38</sup> Longman, 55-56.

<sup>39</sup> Baldwin, 80.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel 1:17, 2:27-28.

and his friends learned very thoroughly all aspects of Babylon's culture and higher education, we can argue that they did not practice it. Their great suzerain King always provided them with the necessary revelation and information they needed. Hence they were not in conflict with the Mosaic prohibition against divination and sorcery.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, considering this as an opportunity of learning to engage culture and demonstrating the pre-eminence of God's culture places Daniel's response to learning the language and literature of the Chaldeans with the second half of the Petrine dichotomy of "living such good lives among the pagans...that they may...glorify God". So Daniel's choice to study the literature and language of the Babylonians was in order to be a better engager of culture. "In order to witness to their God in the Babylonian court they had to understand the cultural presuppositions of those around them, just as the Christian today must work hard at the religions and cultures amongst which he lives, if different thought-worlds are ever to meet."<sup>41</sup> Therefore, we see that the balanced paradigm of being "aliens and strangers" and of "living such good lives among the pagans...that they may...glorify God" helps us to understand Daniel's choice of abstaining from the king's delicacies but learning the language and literature of the Chaldeans.

### **The Wisdom of Establishing a Balanced Identity**

The book of Daniel is said to be both wisdom and apocalyptic literature:

The manifold interpenetration of Old Testament wisdom and apocalyptic must still be affirmed. Nowhere is this interpenetration more visible than in the Book of Daniel. To those who ask the apocalyptists, "What shall we do while we wait for God's victory to take place?" Chapters 1-6 provide answers through the medium of hero tales. The

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<sup>41</sup> Baldwin, 81.

apocalypses of Daniel 7-12 endorse the future of the saints who keep the faith in the way they do in Daniel 1-6.<sup>42</sup>

So the entire book of Daniel is for a people who need to know how to live while waiting for an apocalyptic inauguration and consummation of God's kingdom (the arrival and return of the Son of Man). This is an exact description of our time now as Christians! We wait for Christ's return to usher the consummation of God's kingdom,<sup>43</sup> as we live day to day in this broken world. And what we discovered above is that the best way to wait is to both affirm our alien status and our concurrent residence in a world we do not belong to. Towner comments, "Daniel 1-6 [provides] components of an *interim ethic* [emphasis mine], an answer to the question: Given our strong conviction that God will vindicate himself before the whole world at the end of this age...how shall we who trust him live our lives in the meantime?"<sup>44</sup> We are in an interim status as sojourners of this world to the heavenly world. And this identity must be confirmed in our daily lives.<sup>45</sup> Daniel saw the importance of this and maintained his alien and stranger identity, but was able to live among the pagans (even in prestige)<sup>46</sup> to definitely make his good works visible. And his good works was to the praise of his God by those who witnessed those works as we see in chapters 2 to 6.

We then need wisdom to know in which form we separate ourselves from culture and involve ourselves in culture. For that we turn to the offerings of Richard Niebuhr. Niebuhr offers five typologies to provide categories in the discussion of Christians and

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<sup>42</sup> Towner, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Not to inaugurate God's Kingdom, for Christ already did that with His arrival, death on the cross, and resurrection and made real for His people an "already but not yet" reality.

<sup>44</sup> Towner, 28.

<sup>45</sup> This also because of the "already but not yet" reality.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel 1:22-21.

culture. There have been several criticisms of Niebuhr's typologies as irrelevant and rigid, however. Those criticisms, we will argue, are not necessarily the case. In his introduction to *Christ and Culture*, Niebuhr explains that using typologies helps us to understand a particular subject, apart from the genetic method, which was waning in his time. Niebuhr explains the limitations of the genetic method is that it creates a value system that is irrelevant to the particular individual that is being observed and prevents a true assessment of worth of the individual. So rather than interpreting subjects as containing elements of more or less evolved factors (genetic method), Niebuhr explained that it is more important to consider the subject as a "unique concretion of a number of principles, each of which derives its particular meaning from its place in the whole."<sup>47</sup> Such an approach, however, creates a myriad of variations of principles and even more historical individuals. Thus in order to help sort through the large quantity of possibilities, Niebuhr explains that typologies offer the basic categories to sort the possibilities into more manageable groups. Thus, metaphorically speaking, it is the "alphabet" to help create the "words" for discussion. It is only then, that a more meaningful dialogue can begin, which shows its advantage over the genetic method.

Such benefits of typologies are further appreciated when also understanding its limitations. Thus Niebuhr wisely offers caveats of using the typological method as a sweeping generalization or judgment of the subject at hand. "First of all, a type is a mental construct to which no individual wholly conforms."<sup>48</sup> There are no strict boundaries set by typologies. In fact, the boundaries of types are permeable and fuzzy, which must acclimate to the complexities of an individual. Niebuhr also warns that types

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<sup>47</sup> Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), xxxvii.

<sup>48</sup> Niebuhr, xxxviii.

of one category cannot act as the final summary of the whole, “It is one thing to distinguish sociological types of Christian ethics, but another to claim that the kind of sociological organization which prevails in a group determines the ethical character. Correlations, not determinations, can be dealt with by typology.”<sup>49</sup> Typologies then have the power to shape, but not the power to bind. It offers the terminologies for observers to begin discussing the subject at hand, but it does not lock the discussion into one conclusion. Rather, it turns the discussion into an introspection of the observers and allows for an appreciation of the diversity at hand, “one purpose of typology is that of helping him [the observer] understand his own type as one of many and so to achieve some measure of disinterestedness.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, we see that Niebuhr’s use of typologies is to account for the diversity and complexities of a subject rather than to pigeonhole it via stereotypes and hence still relevant and applicable to our discussion.

So the five typologies offered by Niebuhr are: (1) Christ against culture; (2) The Christ of culture; (3) Christ above culture; (4) Christ and culture in paradox; (5) Christ the transformer of culture. The first two typologies are extreme positions of our dichotomy from the Petrine passage: completely running away from the world vs. completely becoming the world. The last three are positions in-between the first two. Thus far, in light of the above discussion of the permeability of these typologies, our paper’s position would be a combination of typologies 4 and 5. Christ and culture in paradox (or in tension) explains the dual nature of the Christian. We are citizens of two worlds that are often at odds with each other. Martin Luther was the example Niebuhr had in mind for this typology. And this is similar to our advocating of the Christian to be

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<sup>49</sup> Niebuhr, xxxviii.

<sup>50</sup> Niebuhr, xxxix.



aliens of the world while still functioning in the world. Typology 5 is Christ transforming culture. And a blend of this typology is needed because this paper is not advocating for Christians to simply function in the foreign world with no effect. No, 1 Peter 2:12 clearly states that there is a purpose in functioning in this world. First it is to do good works,<sup>51</sup> and second it is so those good works would lead to the glory of God. There is a distinct effect and purpose involved. Although the agenda of this paper's position is not to outright change and transform the current culture so that it is the Christian's other-worldly reality, the level of involvement in the world is to *promote a response* of awe and praise towards God. One may counter that 1 Peter 2:12 says that the glorifying of God is to be "on the day He visits us". However, we recognize, especially with examples from our text and the rest of the book of Daniel, that our involvement of good works before the pagans can cause immediate awe and praise of God as well as a transformation of that current culture towards a God-fearing culture.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the book of Daniel truly is wisdom literature as an interim ethic. And we were able to further the discussion by applying Niebuhr's typologies.

## **Praxis**

We now lastly want to turn to some principles of praxis that we can glean from our text of Daniel 1. For this purpose we will turn to a very helpful and practical study on the book of Daniel by Ajith Fernando. Fernando covers Daniel 1 in two lessons.<sup>53</sup> And from those two lessons he discusses a variety of practical issues, some we have

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<sup>51</sup> Ephesians 2:10.

<sup>52</sup> Daniel 1:21, 2:46-47, 3:28-29, 4:37, 5:29, 6:25-27.

<sup>53</sup> Ajith Fernando, *Spiritual Living in a Secular World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 11-36.

already discussed above. However, from the two lessons, we want to highlight two principles of praxis in Daniel 1. The first principle is being grounded in the scriptures. There are two reasons for this, the first is because the scriptures guide our daily living, and the second is because it provides the proper perspective and foundation in order for us to think biblically towards the other culture around us. Fernando explains the first reason by discussing the influence of the book of Jeremiah on Daniel and his friends. The prophet Jeremiah was explaining to the Israelites about the exile at a time when many of them had no idea why things were happening the way they were. Jeremiah 29 particularly spoke to their situation. And the opening verses of Jeremiah 29 declare the sovereignty of God. The Israelites are reminded that even in these dark times God is sovereign. And their God was commanding them to stay in the cities they were exiled to: not only to stay, but to settle there, increase in number there, to lead normal lives there, and even to pray for the prosperity of their respective cities. The declaration of God's sovereignty and his command could have been received in a very negative manner. And indeed there were those who did react negatively. Psalm 137 records the mournful response of God's people of simply "hanging up their lyres". So there then exists the tension in which the exiled Israelite faced. Do I follow the prophetic declaration to commit to living proactively while in exile? Or do I throw my hands in the air and waste away in mourning? This was the same question for Daniel and his friends.<sup>54</sup> However, a healthy diet of God's word guided them to make the right choice and to live correctly.

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<sup>54</sup> Ronald Wallace, *The Lord is King* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979), 36-37.

“Jeremiah’s letter provides the typical diet that one who feeds on the Word should receive. It has inspiration, promise, advice, and warning.”<sup>55</sup>

To posit that God is sovereign and that His commands are to be followed provides the impetus for Daniel and his friends to take seriously their position as courtiers (or would be courtiers) and to approach it biblically. Daniel would not have lived this out if he had not been regularly immersed in God’s Word, “[God’s Word] would sustain the four youths who sought to live in obedience under such difficult circumstances.”<sup>56</sup> So Daniel and his friends know the commands and promises of God,<sup>57</sup> and it acts as a guide for how to live in their immediate circumstance. And God’s word is further confirmed in their lives as they try to faithfully follow it and then see God’s providence at work on their behalf.<sup>58</sup> And the second reason why the scriptures is important is that it provides the foundation or standard to think biblically about secular issues, “we must test the knowledge we receive with biblical thinking and decide which of it is acceptable, which of it must be modified, and which of it must be rejected totally.”<sup>59</sup> This was immediately apparent and applied when Daniel was learning the language and literature of the Chaldeans.<sup>60</sup> Likewise for us, the scriptures act as our measuring stick for culture. Today’s Christians must biblically assess their culture on a daily basis. And this is only possible when they know what the scriptures say both specifically and principally. That is also why Daniel was able to make a stand not to defile himself with the king’s

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<sup>55</sup> Fernando, 20.

<sup>56</sup> Fernando, 20.

<sup>57</sup> Daniel 9:2.

<sup>58</sup> It is no coincidence that Daniel 1 mentions three times that God gave things in His sovereignty and faithfulness (cf. Daniel 1:2, 9, 15, 17).

<sup>59</sup> Fernando, 22.

<sup>60</sup> Baldwin, 80.

delicacies.<sup>61</sup> So just as conformists or advocates of cultural contextualization would argue that one must know the other culture in depth in order to properly engage it, Fernando would also argue that one must also know one's own cultural authorities (namely the scriptures for Christians) in order to properly engage the other culture.<sup>62</sup> Otherwise the activity will not be an engaging of culture, but rather a joining of it.

The second principle of praxis is demonstrated for us in Daniel 1 and exhorted by Apostle Peter. When engaging culture, it must be exercised with wisdom and tact. Peter tells us to respond to non-believers with gentleness and respect.<sup>63</sup> And we see that wonderfully demonstrated in Daniel's interaction with the chief official and guard in regards to his vegetarian diet request. Daniel 1:8 describes for us Daniel's firm resolve, yet gentle request, "He was both correct and respectful."<sup>64</sup> He resolves not to defile himself, but he asks permission to those in charge for a change in diet, rather than making demands in "righteous indignation". The Hebrew word for "asks for permission" is בִּקְשָׁה. TWOT defines it as "to petition" and explains that it is used in the situation where a subject makes a request to a king.<sup>65</sup> We then see how biblically and wisely Daniel goes about engaging culture and maintaining his identity as an alien and stranger. However, the chief official, though sympathetic because of the Lord's unction, fears his own safety and denies the request. Daniel, in a wonderful display of wisdom, then makes a counter offer. His offer is so reasonable that the guard directly in charge of Daniel

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<sup>61</sup> We have already established that his choice was not based on cultural dietary law, but rather a biblical principle of being faithful to one's covenantal overlord.

<sup>62</sup> Fernando, 22.

<sup>63</sup> 1 Peter 3:15.

<sup>64</sup> Fernando, 27.

<sup>65</sup> Harris, and Archer, #276a.

agrees to it. And we can also note another aspect of Daniel's act of wisdom. There was an element of reliance on God rather than a complete reliance upon the self. Yes, it was Daniel's tact and his wits that allowed him to come up with the test of 10 days and successfully persuade the guard. However, his offer also included his reliance and trust in God. His sovereign suzerain King was going to provide. What an amazing faith! Although the text does not show Daniel's train of thought, we would imagine it would have gone something like this, "If God expects holiness from us, then I firmly believe He will honor all efforts for holiness." And sure enough, God honored it and provided Daniel and his friends with the type of health and nourishment that only God can provide. In our engaging of culture, we need wisdom and tact, but also need to exercise this level of faith in God as an expression of where true wisdom comes from.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, by starting with Fernando's study on the book of Daniel, we were able to highlight two principles for engaging culture: (1) being rooted in God's Word and (2) exercising wisdom and tact. Furthermore, with the additional means of a brief word study and closer analysis of Daniel's offer, were able to further demonstrate the efficacy of such principles and the applicability of them for today's Christian. So now let us take a look at how to engage a non-Christian culture.

### **Creative Culturists**

With regards to the engaging of culture, Andy Crouch gives four examples of how the Church has responded: condemn, critique, copy, and create. He elaborates on the fourth part as the cultural activity that Christians play as image bearers of God's creative

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<sup>66</sup> Proverbs 2:6.

attribute. One of Andy Crouch's definitions of culture is described as such, "Meaning and making go together – culture, you could say, is the activity of making meaning."<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, because we are created in God's image, we too have the creative attribute; and so, as image-bearing Christians, we are to creatively make culture. The purpose of such culture making falls under the paradigm from Niebuhr's *Christ Transforming Culture*.<sup>68</sup> For Crouch, simply condemning, critiquing or copying culture is not enough.<sup>69</sup> Unless we offer an alternative, the non-Christian cultural offerings will go on. Crouch highlights an excellent example of creative culture making in his description of the "othercott" by Barbara Nicolosi. In response to the movie, *The Da Vinci Code*, Nicolosi refused to see this as a resource for evangelism or engagement. But she did not want to create publicity for the movie by boycotting or picketing the movie. So instead, she suggested Christians to go out on the opening weekend of *The Da Vinci Code* and to watch a different movie that opened that same weekend instead. She suggested the more family friendly movie, *Over the Hedge*. Crouch praises her for her creative culture making, "Nicolosi was already far from simply condemning, critiquing or copying culture – she was doing her best to be creative in the face of a real (though also, as it turned out, stultifyingly dull) challenge to faith."<sup>70</sup> This definitely is not easy. Being this creative in response to culture, to make our own culture, does not occur so quickly. It would require a lot of thoughtful training, where Crouch would call "cultivation and creation": to be able to survey the landscape, understand it, and glean the good from it,

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<sup>67</sup> Andy Crouch, *Culture Making* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 24.

<sup>68</sup> Crouch, 179-183.

<sup>69</sup> Crouch, 67-69.

<sup>70</sup> Crouch, 71.

and then use it as the new canvas or backdrop for creating something beautiful on it.<sup>71</sup>

The message of challenging postmodern Christians to exercise their creativity as image bearers of God in order to challenge a worldly culture is essential for them and an important demonstration of a sojourner identity lived out. It may be the easiest to express culture making through acts of community service or social justice. Crouch lists a number of instances where people of good education and power use their resources to help the powerless or create opportunities and programs to assist them.<sup>72</sup>

Crouch makes the point of culture making being in the very nature of man by drawing the reader's attention to the creation narrative. He vividly shows how God creates man as a creative, communal being and explains how God even provides the canvas, creative space, for Adam and Eve to be creative culturists.<sup>73</sup> Crouch rightly explains the fall and how God intervenes to once again show his almighty creative power in fashioning redemption from the fall. He highlights the Tower of Babel as the epitome of the city of fallen human culturists and contrasts it to the New Jerusalem that God is preparing for his redeemed people in Revelation 21:1-2.<sup>74</sup> God's creative project of redemption is played out in history and shows the beginning of a nation from Abraham, to the starting of a church with Christ as its cornerstone. Crouch then takes us through the major narratives of the bible to show how the creative culture project of God unfolds, climaxes in Christ with the amazing culture making power of the cross, and eternally creates sustainability in the New Jerusalem.<sup>75</sup> He sums up this whole process:

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<sup>71</sup> Crouch, 73-77.

<sup>72</sup> Crouch, 231-232.

<sup>73</sup> Crouch, 101-110.

<sup>74</sup> Crouch, 121-124.

<sup>75</sup> Crouch, Chap 8-10.

To put it most boldly: culture is God's original plan for humanity – and it is God's original gift to humanity, both duty and grace. Culture is the scene of humanity's rebellion against their Creator, the scene of judgment – and it is also the setting of God's mercy. At Babel the nations try to insulate and isolate themselves from God through a city, where culture reaches critical mass – but beginning with Abraham God forms a nation that will demonstrate the goodness and faithfulness of dependence on God. Jesus himself, a descendent of Abraham, is both a cultivator of culture, dwelling in and affirming much that is good in it, and a creator of culture, offering dramatically new cultural goods that reshape the horizons of the possible and impossible for Jews and Gentiles alike. He is crushed by culture, experiencing the full weight of its brokenness on the cross – yet his resurrection begins a slow but inexorable redemption of culture, offering a down payment on the hope that culture's story will not have a dead end but rather a new beginning.<sup>76</sup>

So just as God is involved in the creative culture project, we too are called and meant to create culture also. Crouch makes the appropriate point of saying that Christians are not the transformers of culture or changers of the world, only God is.<sup>77</sup> “How can we join his culture making and live out our own calling to make something of the world, without slowly and subtly giving in to the temptation to take his place?”<sup>78</sup> But in addition to attributing the ultimate creative power and even the teleological creative input to God, the important caveat that must be made is that just because we are called to be culture makers, does not mean that we are sanctified culture makers. Crouch's advocacy for culture-making does not sufficiently take into account the sinful reality of the Christian. Yes, the Christian is justified by Christ, yet he or she is still being sanctified. Yes, as image bearers of God, we have the communicable attribute of creating, but we must acknowledge the limits of that creativity as finite beings versus an infinite God and even more so, how our image bearer status has been marred by sin. So one must then take into account the sin factor of Christians as culture makers. We simply cannot assume that everything that is created by Christian culture makers is somehow bona fide good culture.

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<sup>76</sup> Crouch, 175.

<sup>77</sup> Crouch, 182.

<sup>78</sup> Crouch, 201.



Our sojourner identity, then helps us here as well. The idea that we are sojourners also explains our covenantal relationship with God. That relationship not only shows that we are now a people of God, but that we are also being sanctified into the image of our Creator.<sup>79</sup> Then and only then can we consider our culture making to be a redeemed attribute. And then Crouch's contribution of seeing the whole of the biblical narrative from the culture perspective, ultimately God's creative culture project of redemption culminating in the New Jerusalem, offers an important aspect of how a sojourner identity of cultivating culture towards the telos of longing for and inviting that New Jerusalem is lived out.

So if we are to be culture-makers in a secular world, how do we communicate with a world that is pagan? Peter answered that we communicate through our actions (in good deeds), but one would figure words would be necessary at some point. William Willimon wrote in, *Peculiar Speech*, that preachers are failing to uphold the identity of the baptized when shunning to use their native language to their congregations. Removing language like sin, crucifixion, judgment in order to appease non-believing visitors strips away the very distinctive identity of the Christian church. He writes:

To preach among the baptized or the being baptized is to operate within *a domain of distinctive discourse*. We talk differently here, work within a certain "language game" to which everyone here subscribes for the duration of the conversation. The language is rooted in the elemental narrative testimony: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4). A *distinctive identity* [emphasis mine] arises from this distinctive community of discourse.<sup>80</sup>

Christian Sojourners have a distinct identity that maintains a distinct language. So with a distinct language how do we communicate with a world that is distinctively different

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<sup>79</sup> Colossians 3:10.

<sup>80</sup> William Willimon, *Peculiar Speech* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 6.

from the sojourner identity? Also, if our interaction is to lead to the glorification of the Father by unbelievers, our communication with them is one that needs to be evangelistic. For that question and issue we turn to a debate between Stanley Fish and Richard Neuhaus on the possibilities of communication between Christians and non-Christians, groups with differing world views.

### **Dialoging Between Sojourners and Pagans**

Stanley Fish asserts that accommodation cannot be possible between liberals and Christians. Fish first describes a very important concept of presuppositionalism, which we will discuss later, but in addition he also reveals the contradictory “tolerance” of modern liberals. He presents the problem that liberals have with Christianity, “The trouble with Christianity, and with any religion on grounded in unshakable convictions, is that it lacks the generosity necessary to the market place [of ideas]’s full functioning.”<sup>81</sup> Fish then explains that the liberal demand for tolerance is not really tolerance at all, but is actually quite discriminatory. He utilizes the argument of Willmoore Kendall to show that “The all-questions-are-open-questions society...cannot practice tolerance toward those who disagree with it; those it must persecute-and so on its very own showing, arrest the pursuit of truth.”<sup>82</sup> This however is not sufficient for Fish. For there are far more deeper rooted issues than just gaining access to the liberals’ pursuit of truth:

If you persuade liberalism that its dismissive marginalizing of religious discourse is a violation of its own chief principle, all you will gain is the right to sit down at liberalism’s table where before you were denied an invitation; but it will still be

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<sup>81</sup> Stanley Fish, “Why We Can’t All Just Get Along,” *First Things*, (February 1996) 21.

<sup>82</sup> Fish, 21.

*liberalism's* table that you are sitting at, and the etiquette of the conversation will still be hers."<sup>83</sup>

He argues that any attempts to try and enter the arena of the liberals is only a weakening of the message and thus makes the true Christian message ineffectual and impotent.

Essentially, the message is still subject to an entirely antithetical and even hostile set of rules. In such case, entrance/acceptance is useless. Instead of trying to be noticed and acknowledged by liberals, Christians ought to have a more forceful approach of changing the *table* on liberals. Fish calls for an uprooting of liberals, "The religious person should not seek an accommodation with liberalism; he should seek to rout it from the field, to extirpate it, root and branch."<sup>84</sup> And thus, Fish concludes that there cannot be a "getting along" between Christians and liberals because they have so very different epistemological bases (to be further explained in the section on presuppositionalism).

And so the question is not one of getting along, but rather getting rid.

Neuhaus on the other hand has a different view of discourse between the liberals and Christians. He sets out to show the need and possibility of getting along with liberals by redefining tolerance. What Neuhaus essentially desires is an accommodation in love. He advocates a new tolerance "made necessary by two factors: cognitive humility and love for neighbor."<sup>85</sup> He tries to explain that conversation can be possible, that the Christian by entering into the arena is not losing the strength of his message, because in reality he is already anchored and plugged into the real table of community, which is the Eucharistic table at which Christ is seated as the head.<sup>86</sup> For Neuhaus there is not just

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<sup>83</sup> Fish, 21.

<sup>84</sup> Fish, 21.

<sup>85</sup> John Neuhaus "Why We Can Get Along," *First Things*, (February 1996) 31.

<sup>86</sup> Neuhaus, 32.

one table of discussion, but rather another and far more important table exists for Christians. The Eucharistic table is the more essential table for Christians, and as long as their truth is founded upon that table, they can venture out onto other tables of discussion without the threat of losing their grasp on essential truth. Neuhaus would even further argue that because of the reality of sin and the not-yet arrival of God's Kingdom on earth, the church and state should be separated, "Because there are different tables, a liberal regime that Christians can affirm assumes that the most important questions are not and should not be political."<sup>87</sup> That is why the existence of multiple tables is healthy and ought to be maintained and is what makes "getting along" between Christians and liberals possible.

We have surveyed two approaches to how a different-worldview dialogue ought to occur. One talks of a more dynamic reconstructing of the playing field, while the other is a more subtle approach to playing the playing field but finding comfort that although you do not have current home court advantage, you have a home court that is ready for you and is where you found your original playing skills in the first place. Perhaps a better understanding can be had of which of the two provides a better principle for postmodern dialogue if we can find similar examples of each suggestion. So let us begin with a postmodern example.

### A Holistic Epistemological Web

In her book, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, Nancy Murphy first describes the

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<sup>87</sup> Neuhaus, 33.

epistemological roots of Protestant Christian theology. She argues that foundationalism, which finds its inception in Descartes, is the real reason for the split between conservative and liberal Christian theologians. As a metaphor, foundationalism is like a building that is built upon a foundation. The surety of that building solely depends on the strength and stability of that foundation. Also, all forms of knowledge that is stacked upon each other are held accountable to one another and finds their ultimate authority upon that firm foundation.<sup>88</sup> This principle then has caused Christian theology to split. Murphy's first thesis is that "foundationalism has contributed to the split between liberals and conservative theologies by forcing theologians to choose Scripture or experience as the source of this special, foundational class of beliefs."<sup>89</sup> After having proven the reasons for the split within Protestant Christian theology, Murphy proceeds to show the problems of foundationalism and offers a new method of theology that could in fact unite the split.

Murphy presents the principle of holism as the means of interlocking all knowledge together. Murphy first explains the problem with foundationalism in that all foundations are too theory laden to be tracked back as an ultimate. Even science has been susceptible to such attacks of its authority.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, with foundationalism, there will always be a rift between differing types of knowledge. Going back to the metaphor of the building, if two towers are visible, there can be found no connection between the two because they are located upon very differing foundations. So, in order to create communication and familiarize theologians to prevalent postmodern principles,

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<sup>88</sup> Nancy Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>89</sup> Murphy, 2.

<sup>90</sup> Murphy, 91.

Murphy urged theologians to adopt an epistemology of holism. She presents Quine's thesis of the web of knowledge. Rather than having one single building of knowledge, Quine argues for a web of knowledge; and there are multiple webs of knowledge that all overlap with each other. So there will always be points of reference with other webs of knowledge, while still remaining on your own web. All knowledge then is interconnected with one another, and one does not necessarily negate the other. Of course one cannot simply have a myriad of truths all over the place, and so depending on emphases provided by history, the web of knowledge can be shifted to give more weight to other sections, thus accommodating to the changing times.<sup>91</sup> Murphy takes this paradigm to deeper discussions for theological method, addressing postmodern understandings of cultural practice for theology and understandings of the role of language in theology, but this is as far as we need to go for our discussion of different-worldview dialogue.

As it can be guessed, this model of holism is found to be similar to Neuhaus' discussion of many tables. For Neuhaus, however, one web is indeed more substantial than other webs of knowledge. Yet, since all webs of knowledge are interconnected, a peaceful getting along and yet preservation of essential truths is still possible. Now let us turn to an older twentieth century example.

### Epistemologically Too Different

J. Gresham Machen made one of the first clear distinctions that liberalism and Christianity cannot get along. In his book, *Christianity and Liberalism*, Machen set out

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<sup>91</sup> Murphy, 94-95.

on a mission to set the record straight. He noticed and recognized the up and coming force called liberalism and began to call it for what it really was, anything but Christianity. Liberalism for Machen was the new theology that arose to address its contemporaries who were attacking Christianity. Machen explains that liberalism, however, simply acts to winnow through Christian doctrines and give up the “non-important” ones in order to save the rest of Christianity.<sup>92</sup> In other words, according to Machen, liberalism concedes to the demands of modern science in hopes of the promise of being kept alive. He begins by pinpointing the root of liberalism, naturalism, which is “the denial of any entrance of the creative power of God (as distinguished from the ordinary course of nature) in connection with the origin of Christianity.”<sup>93</sup> He then traces liberalism to industrialization and progress, which were motivated by science and a conscious effort of the human spirit. And as a result of such relations, he described his current time as one where every authority from the past was put to question, “In such an age it is obvious that every inheritance from the past must be subject to searching criticism; and as a matter of fact some convictions of the human race have crumbled to pieces in the test.”<sup>94</sup> Machen’s purpose, then, was to disown liberalism as a Christian religion and to show that orthodox Christianity will be just fine against modern science’s attacks.

What is of special interest for our discussion of different-worldview dialogue are some of the reasons Machen provides for his exclusion of liberalism. He first says that the conflict itself represents a topic of grave importance, “the things about which men are

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<sup>92</sup> Gresham Machen *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1923), 6.

<sup>93</sup> Machen, 2.

<sup>94</sup> Machen, 4.

agreed are apt to be the things that are the least worth holding; the really important things are the things about which men will fight.”<sup>95</sup> Machen assumes that disagreements and fighting are essential to the important topics. Looking for accommodation or peace is not part of the agenda of maintaining vital truths. But this difficult, unsettling reality of the defense of faith is still okay for Machen, for he assures the reader that, “the things that are sometimes thought to be the hardest to defend are also the things that are most worth defending.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, Machen cannot condone any such attempts at accommodation. That is why he tries to extirpate liberalism from any tie with Christianity. Machen’s reasons up until now may seem odd and a little too gallant for some, but his real reason against accommodation is because of the danger of making Christianity into something that it is not and just another world religion, “The liberal attempt at reconciling Christianity with modern science has really relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity, so that what remains is in essentials only that same indefinite type of religious aspirations which was in the world before Christianity came upon the scene.”<sup>97</sup> Obviously, the similarities between Machen and Fish are evident. Opposite to Murphy and Neuhaus, accommodation for Machen and Fish are absolutely unthinkable and only debilitating to Christianity. But rather than simply finding examples of both sides, let us now expound upon a tool that can help us understand each side better.

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<sup>95</sup> Machen, 2.

<sup>96</sup> Machen, 8.

<sup>97</sup> Machen, 7.



## Presuppositionalism

The tool to help guide our discussion on different-worldview dialogue is presuppositionalism. Presuppositionalism is first understanding that everyone has a different world view. Then, that world view is shaped by different cognitive starting points of the particular individual. And whatever that starting point is, it will determine the shape of the rest of that individual's thinking. Let us turn to John Frame for a more in depth discussion of presuppositionalism.

John Frame defines presuppositionalism as, "A presupposition is a belief that takes precedence over another and therefore serves as a criterion for another. An ultimate presupposition is a belief over which no other takes precedence."<sup>98</sup> Presuppositionalism comes from a long history of epistemological queries. The search has been one over a priori and a posteriori knowledge. Does one know knowledge without any experience (a priori) or does one know knowledge only after experience (a posteriori)? Some philosophers, such as Plato, have argued for a priori knowledge, that experience simply mirrors something that we already innately know in our minds. While others, like Locke, argue that the mind is a blank slate and awaits knowledge to be written on it, which is conditioned by sense experience of the world around us. Finally, there are those, like Aristotle and most other philosophers, who say that both are at play for epistemology. They claim that "experience is a necessary ingredient in knowledge, but that experience must be conceptualized, analyzed, and formulated by a priori concepts already in the mind."<sup>99</sup> But even the moderating position had its setbacks because of the difficulty in

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<sup>98</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1987), 45.

<sup>99</sup> John Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thoughts* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1995), 132.

distinguishing between pure a priori elements from pure a posteriori elements. Up until this point of philosophical history, presuppositions, then, was seen to be in the category of a priori knowledge. Kant took the two sides of the epistemological debate and created the transcendental method. He agreed that experience is important to knowledge, but also agreed that in order to make any sense out of experience a prior knowledge had to exist as well. So he proposed that a priori was acquired transcendently “by asking, What are the preconditions of meaning and rationality? Granting that knowledge is possible, in other words, what must we presuppose to be true?”<sup>100</sup> This is the breeding ground for presuppositionalism that Cornelius Van Til fashioned into an apologetics for Christianity (though he never officially called his apologetics presuppositionalism). He took the transcendental question of a priori knowledge, presuppositions, and applied it to explaining the role that divine revelation ought to play in human thought. Frame explains, “The doctrine is merely the outworking of the lordship of God in the area of human thought. It merely applies the doctrine of scriptural infallibility to the realm of knowledge.”<sup>101</sup> The presuppositionalism is the understanding that God’s revelation in His Word is the ultimate commitment for knowledge for the Christian, while “non-Christians substitute something else – another god, themselves, pleasure, money, rationality, or whatever – as that to which they are ultimately committed and that which governs all of life, including thought.”<sup>102</sup> Presuppositionalism as a doctrine helps us to see how Christians ought to submit their knowledge to God’s revelation, the “pre” of presuppositionalism beings a statement of authority, the *pre*eminence of God in our realm

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<sup>100</sup> Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 133.

<sup>101</sup> Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 45.

<sup>102</sup> Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 136.

of knowledge, rather than a chronological insistence of “before all other knowledge”.<sup>103</sup>

Presuppositionalism also is not an issue of Van Til debasing the use of evidence, otherwise it would simply return presupposition back to the category of a priori knowledge:

I do not artificially separate induction from deduction, or reasoning about the facts of nature from reasoning in a prior analytical fashion about the nature of human consciousness. I do not artificially abstract or separate them from one another. On the contrary I see induction and analytical reasoning as part of one process of interpretation.<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, in addition to its contributions to epistemology for the Christian, presuppositionalism helps us in our approach to non-Christian world views.

Presuppositionalism helps us identify what the non-Christian’s ultimate beliefs are and how those beliefs condition and serve as a criterion for other beliefs. It is at this point that presuppositionalism is a helpful tool for understanding postmodern dialogue.

Picking up the Fish-Neuhaus debate once more, Fish, then, makes the case for understanding and acknowledging presuppositionalism. His contrasting of Adam and Satan in *Paradise Lost* charts the complete different destinations of the two because of the one differing starting point: I have been created by God or I have created myself. These various presuppositions also lead them to view God in different ways as well: Adam is trusting of God as the benevolent creator, while Satan is suspicious of God as the cruel dictator. Fish, however, does seem to fall into the more classic understanding of presuppositionalism when he writes:

In neither case does the conclusion follow necessarily from the observed fact of imperfect knowledge. In both cases something is missing, a first premise, and in both cases reasoning can’t get started until a first premise is put in place. What’s more, since the first premise is what is missing, it cannot be derived from anything in the visible scene; it

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<sup>103</sup> Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 137.

<sup>104</sup> Frame, *Cornelius Van Til*, 135.

is what must be imported – on no evidentiary basis whatsoever – so that the visible scene, the things of this world, can *acquire* the meaning and significance they will now have.<sup>105</sup>

He says this in explaining that when faced with a situation where no empirical data can provide information, Adam and Satan have to choose a first premise in order to make a decision of their immediate surroundings *apart* from an evidentiary basis. Thus, Fish seems to be referring to a more a priori sense of knowledge. And this leads Neuhaus to critique Fish as pitting faith against reason, critical thought against commitment to truth. However, Fish does clarify his position when he responds to Neuhaus' accusation. Fish explains:

I don't regard these opposed to one another (they are not binaries) but as mutually interdependent. The difference between a believer and a nonbeliever is not that one reasons and the other doesn't, but that one reasons from a first premise the other denies; and from this difference flow others that make the fact that both are reasoning a sign not of commonality but of its absence.<sup>106</sup>

Thus, Fish may not be necessarily using presuppositionalism in a priori categories.

Furthermore, whether or not Fish's view of presuppositionalism (note: he never uses the term presupposition) is more a priori or more transcendental, we can see that he elucidates the reality that cognitive starting points lead to very different destinations and even act as strong biases towards whatever new situation the subject is faced with. So with regards to presuppositions, Fish is absolutely correct about how Christians and Liberals will approach various issues and topics. He rightly explains that both parties will present completely antithetical propositions as well as conclusions to whatever is discussed. Thus Fish's conclusion is to completely bar any forms of accommodation and rather desires the uprooting and changing of presuppositions, or changing the

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<sup>105</sup> Fish, 19.

<sup>106</sup> Stanley Fish, "Stanley Fish replies to Richard John Neuhaus," *First Things* (February 1996) 35.

table/playing field to one that is Christian.<sup>107</sup> Now then, let us turn to Neuhaus and see what presuppositionalism can unearth in his argument.

Although not as directly and clearly as Fish, Neuhaus also concurs with the understanding of presuppositionalism. He argues that there is more than one table. The public discourse table of the liberals is not the only table that is important to the Christian. Rather the more important is the Eucharistic table where Christ is the head of the table.<sup>108</sup> Neuhaus rightly understands that the differing world views exist and that one world view must be held over another. He makes the statement that Christ's table is truly the best table to be at:

Lest anyone mistake this argument for a roundabout defense of contemporary liberalism's indifference to truth ... they should know that it is grounded in the supreme and indispensable confidence, celebrated at the table of the Lord, that St. Paul had it right when he declared, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).<sup>109</sup>

Neuhaus attests to the superiority of that table of Christ and grounds his entire argument on biblical truth. So for Neuhaus, his grounding, his presupposition, is on Christ's authority.

Presuppositionalism then is vital for understanding that different world views exist and that they must be somehow addressed in order for dialogue to proceed. We now want to offer a biblical suggestion of how to proceed in such a dialogue after using presuppositionalism to unearth different world views.

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<sup>107</sup> See footnote #6.

<sup>108</sup> Neuhaus, 32.

<sup>109</sup> Neuhaus, 34.

## Paul's Proselytizing Paradigm

Thus far, it has been the strength of Fish's argument that there are indeed very different presuppositions between Christians and liberals that will make conversation or even getting along an ideal that is not possible because distinctive truths of Christianity would be lost. And it has been the strength of Neuhaus to assert that in the name of love, connecting points must be made to enable dialogue between Christians and liberals. We want to take the otherness aspect of Fish's argument and the point of contact aspect of Neuhaus' argument and offer a biblical paradigm of how to do those two.

It is the opinion of this paper that promoting different-worldview dialogue is for the main purpose of facilitating the evangelical effort to present the gospel message to non-Christians. Whether it be through word or deed, as Christians with an "in the world but not of the world" reality, we have the responsibility of pointing this world to Christ. Therefore it is appropriate to turn to Paul's evangelistic efforts to look for clues for effective different-worldview dialogue as well as even how to make such efforts possible. We will be particularly looking at Acts 13 and Acts 17. The former chapter is Paul's dealings with Jews in Antioch and the latter chapter are Paul's interactions with the Greeks of Athens. Let us now first turn to Acts 13:13-52.

Paul first accounted for the similarities in the world view of the Jews, but still understood the differences, so that he presented to the Jews the new presupposition of beholding Jesus Christ as the true Messiah and Savior. Here in Antioch, as Paul went to worship in the synagogue, Paul was addressing Jews. Now for the Jews, they had a similar world view as Paul and the Christians. They would have understood the concept of sin, the coming of a Messiah, the authority of scripture and as well as that God was

Creator of all. With so many common understandings, we see Paul creating the perfect strategy of gospel presentation. So by beginning with the Torah, Paul went through the entire history of Israel, highlighting the important elements of Israel's history, particularly those that pointed to the line of David and the coming of the Messiah. His address is:

Summed up as a historical survey designed to root the coming of Jesus in the kingly succession of Judah and to show that the career of Jesus was in fulfillment of prophecy: it culminates in an appeal to the hearers not to repeat the error of the people of Jerusalem who had rejected Jesus. The general pattern is similar to that of the other speeches in the first part of Acts.<sup>110</sup>

C.K. Barrett makes the additional comment that “speeches in Acts are differentiated less with reference to the speakers than with reference to the audience.”<sup>111</sup> So Paul having understood the world views and presuppositions of his audience, proceeds to make the case for the lordship of Jesus Christ. Essentially and initially, the principle that we see is that Paul spoke in terms of where his audience was. He used common referents to state his case for Christ so that the people, though with different presuppositions, could understand him. We note that even with the apparent similarities in world view between Jews and Christians, Paul was very aware of the differences and compellingly pointed out that difference, which was that Jesus is the Messiah. He even warns them (as mentioned above) not to make the same mistake as the Jews in Jerusalem did! So Paul was in no way trying to be accommodating to them or “politically correct”<sup>112</sup> with them. Therefore, understanding the other party's world view and making adjustments to fit that differing presupposition for the purpose of making contact, made the gospel presentation via

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<sup>110</sup> Howard Marshall, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 221.

<sup>111</sup> C.K. Barrett, *Acts* vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 623.

<sup>112</sup> The phrase is placed into quotes because it would be an anachronism to say that Paul knew what the phrase “being politically correct” is.

different-worldview dialogue possible without watering down the message. Now let us turn to an example where the world view of Paul's conversation partners is not as common with Paul's. We now look to Acts 17:16-34 with the help of the above cited Willimon's *Peculiar Speech*.

In a different worldview city, Paul's strategy of dialogue unfolds more pertinently to our discussion of different-worldview dialogue. When Paul entered Athens, he went and surveyed the city. By doing so he acquired knowledge of the culture of the city. We see in the beginning of our pericope, Paul went first to the synagogue to teach and preach. This was a common activity for Paul, to go where Jews were first. This approach could be imagined to have been similar with the discussion on Acts 13 above. And then this allowed him the opportunity to speak at Mars Hill, for he was overheard by Epicureans and Stoics. It is important to note here that the Epicureans and Stoics were baffled at what Paul was trying to say (Acts 17:18). It is also important to note that Paul acquired admission to public discourse, Mars Hill (which is known as one of the great Greek forums for discussion of new ideas and such) not by having accommodated his message. He was invited to speak at Mars Hill on his own terms. On his own terms, Paul could have easily repeated what he had just preached in the synagogues. But Paul does not do that. He quickly understands the different worldviews held by his audiences (note verse 18 again) and makes adjustments so that he could be understood. Let us first see what this differing world view is, because it is in stark contrast to that of the Jewish synagogues.



The background context of all these events is the Roman empire. The Roman Empire demanded a kind of religious pluralism for the purpose of Pax Romana.<sup>113</sup> In order to break up the trifold cord of religion/land/people, Romans, after having conquered a new country, would adopt some of the annexed people's gods. This would usually appease the annexed people and also convince them to accept the Roman gods as well. Therefore, a religious pluralism was widely accepted and often demanded by the Roman empire. So we can see the willingness that the people of Athens had for listening to Paul. This however can be a misleading point, if one concludes that the Athenians were readily open to accepting a new religion. On the contrary, the force of religious pluralism in the Roman Empire would have shunned any sort of clear-cut statement of a declaration for one religious truth. This is just the political aspect of the different worldview that Paul faced with his audience. There also was a philosophical aspect too. The main groups of people that Paul was addressing were the Epicureans and Stoics. Let us see what each believed.

The basis of Epicurus' system is the idea that all existence is material, made up of atoms which are eternal and always in motion. This motion is not caused by any outside force, but arises from the natural weight of the atoms. Their downward motion is sometimes altered by 'the swerve,' an unpredictable sideways movement which causes one atom to collide with another...[Also,] Epicurus taught that pleasure was the ultimate purpose of life,...freedom from pain or disturbance."<sup>114</sup>

So for Epicureans life was a material life that ought to be undisturbed and tranquil, to live apart from the world and to avoid as many of these "swerves" as possible. The gods lived like this, apart from the world, so we ought to as well. Stoics believed a very determined path of the gods on humans.

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<sup>113</sup> Albert Bell, *Exploring the New Testament World* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 115.

<sup>114</sup> Bell, 169.

Stoics held that the gods, and above them Fate, governed everything that happened in the world. People could not change anything by their actions. The only hope for happiness, then, was to accept whatever happened as coming from the gods and not protest against it...Do not be too sad when misfortune comes your way, or too happy when you seem to be blessed. Neither state of affairs arises from anything you as an individual have done, and either of them can change in an instant.<sup>115</sup>

So human ideal, then, is to conduct life in parallel with this god/principle of reason which must rule over emotion and passion. Stoicism is also likened to pantheism, where there is no difference between creation and god.<sup>116</sup> These ideas are quite different from the Christian worldview of a God who is wholly involved in His creation and yet distinct from His creation. After understanding these different worldviews, Paul proceeds to tackle the challenge of dialoguing with these non-Christians.

First of all, Paul takes upon biblical priorities in his efforts. The first is a God-centered cultural analysis. His survey of the city and wonderment at the number of idols and temples for idols could have been very daunting for him. The presence and, as we mentioned earlier, requirement of religious pluralisms could have struck fear in the heart of a Christian who is trying to present THE God to a people who want nothing to do with just one god. Rather than succumbing to the religious pluralism and being daunted by the sheer marvel of the number of gods and beauty of the temples, Paul sees the cultural practices for what they are, idolatry. Willimon explains, “Good Jew that he is, Paul knows that our chief human problem is not atheism but idolatry. We are all ‘extremely religious.’ Idolatry comes to us quite naturally.”<sup>117</sup> The second biblical priority is for Paul to go and evangelize. We saw that he started with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles, but he continued to speak to blatant pagans as well. He simply went forth and

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<sup>115</sup> Bell, 172.

<sup>116</sup> Marshall, 281.

<sup>117</sup> Willimon, 84.

began to preach the good news, which later grants him the invitation to speak at Mars Hill. Now we turn to the very heart of Paul's gospel presentation at Mars Hill. It is here that Paul makes the clear claim for the gospel and where we can note the methods of challenging and changing very different worldviews.

It is clear that the worldview of Paul and the audience at Mars Hill are obviously different. Unlike the previous audiences of the Jewish synagogues, Paul is dealing with a people who have never heard of the scriptures, a coming Messiah, the aspect of sin, let alone a God who created the earth. So we can follow nine steps of how Paul presents a biblical worldview to his listeners.<sup>118</sup> But before we analyze those nine steps, we must note how Paul begins his worldview challenge. He begins by commenting on the Athenian culture and complimenting them for their very religious nature. He then uses a specific example that he had seen in the city, an altar to an Unknown God, to present the true God, by saying that that day he would introduce to them just who this unknown god that they were worshipping was. Paul grabs the attention of his listeners by speaking of things that are familiar to them. And then he fashions that familiarity into a relation to the real truth he is about to present. All the way his message is never altered or accommodated to be more pleasant in the ears of the Athenians. Instead Paul makes no excuses for truth and confronts the differing worldview head on. First of all in verse 24 Paul establishes that God is the creator of the world and everything in it. This rules out pantheism and even establishes a sense of responsibility for man, as creature, towards his creator. It also rules out the idea of an unconcerned god. Secondly, Paul insists that God cannot be domesticated in the many temples created by mans' hands. Rather, God aseity

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<sup>118</sup> Julius Kim, *The Ministry of Witness*, (class lecture, Westminster Seminary CA, January 22, 2003).

is proclaimed in verse 25, which is the third point. Fourthly, Paul then flips the notion of God's aseity around and argues that it is WE who are dependent and in need of God, for without him we would have no life or breath or anything else! So any Greco-Roman philosophy of independence is left with no room to stand. Fifthly, Paul switches from theology to anthropology proper, arguing that all the nations are from one man and that they are placed where they are by the decision of God. Sixthly, we see how Paul is setting up the background of sin by explaining in verse 27 that God did these things to be found by his creation. That He desires for man to come and reach out for Him. Seventhly, Paul, after having established the transcendence of God, brings in the closeness of God. God is reachable and immanent. Verse 28 talks of the intimate relationship that is had between God and his creation. What is also noteworthy is how Paul uses a common poetry (although used quite loosely) to make another connecting point of reference for the Athenians to relate to. Eighthly, Paul makes an unabashed attack on sin. In verses 30 and 31 Paul explains and condemns the idolatry that is so obvious in the Athenians and tells them that their transcendent and immanent Creator commands them to repent for their idolatry. He challenges their view of time as being circular. He clearly points to an end, and end of judgment by the God who created all things! But he does not leave the Athenians without any hope. Ninthly, he presents the gospel message, the promise of forgiveness through a Savior and the death and resurrection of this savior that makes forgiveness and salvation possible!

Paul masterfully uses common points of reference in his dialogue with the Athenians at Mars Hill. However, he never changes his message. In fact, his message of

the death and resurrection of Christ and judgment is so offensive, that the Athenians jeer him off Mars Hill. Willimon explains:

In mentioning the judgment and resurrection, Paul risks rejection by his audience. They may agree to a created world and to our common humanity, but there is no possible “natural theology” evidence for an assertion of the resurrection. There is no evidence that our actions shall be judged by an authority higher than our own opinions. His assertion of judgment may even be a more radical claim than his assertion of the resurrection. Appeals to reason and to observation of the natural world are risky in the proclamation of the gospel. Eventually revelation must be invoked and the scandal of faith both to pagan reason and pagan experience must be made plain. Of course, it is not that Paul denies the value of both “reason” and “experience.” It is rather that Paul asserts some very un-pagan definitions of reason and experience.... Even Paul’s oratorical skill cannot remove the offense of the gospel – in fact, it accentuates it.<sup>119</sup>

We clearly see here a biblical example where dialogue between two different worldviews is possible. Particularly in the light of the command to witness God’s gospel, such dialogue is a necessity. Paul showed that wisdom and particular understanding of the various worldviews at hand is necessary to properly approach and speak to people with so different worldviews. What Paul does is to reveal to his listeners their presuppositions contrasted to the presuppositions of Christianity. Having knowledge of what his listeners’ presuppositions are allows him to make points of contact with his listeners. But having a clear stance on which and whose presupposition is to be the ultimate, Paul makes a non-watered down proclamation of the truth of Christianity. Eckhard Schnabel explains that Paul’s technique is not simply contextualization but is a transcending of contextualization with God’s revelation, “Rather than drawing on Graeco-Roman philosophical traditions as a kind of preparation for the gospel, then, Paul is transcending these with revealed theology.”<sup>120</sup> Transcending contextualization is what presuppositionalism is doing. Therefore, it is in using presuppositionalism that helps

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<sup>119</sup> Willimon, 85.

<sup>120</sup> Eckhard Schnabel, “Contextualizing Paul in Athens: The Proclamation of the Gospel Before Pagan Audiences in the Graeco-Roman World” *Religion and Theology*, 2 (Dec 2005): 172.

locate and understand other non-Christians' differing worldviews and presuppositions and helps present the true and ultimate presupposition of submitting to the lordship of God the Creator.

### **Conclusion**

To provide an exhaustive list of how to particularly live out a sojourner identity would be beyond the scope of this treatise. However, this chapter lays out the important starting points and principles that will help guide a young sojourner on her way. By introducing two biblical case studies of bicultural people of God, we saw how the role of their identity in God/citizenship in God's kingdom provided the basis for wisely interacting with different and secular cultures. In the engaging of these cultures, we saw the proposal of creative culture making to reflect the divine creative culture project of God himself for history. But the engaging of culture is not only in actions, but also requires words. So we saw the role that presuppositionalism can play in helping with the dialogue for evangelism with a non-believing culture/audience. We then concluded with another biblical example of what that type of biblical witnessing to people with different world views looks like. This is an important aspect of the sojourner identity because as mentioned throughout this treatise and begun in the introduction, the Petrine passage reminds us aliens and strangers that our lives are to lead to the pagans' glorifying/praising our Father in heaven. So a life of witnessing is also a core expression of the sojourner identity.

## CONCLUSION

If you do not know your true identity, then you will be living foolishly. And it is the concern of this pastor that Christian postmodern generations have lost their true identity and are living aimless worldly lives. The previous chapters were offered in hopes that Christian postmodern generations would be challenged to remember what makes them Christian in the first place and then what the ramifications of being a Christian entails. From studying how identity is formed, what the present identity crisis looks like, and what a sojourner identity should look like various suggestions were made to Christian postmodern generations of how and why a sojourner identity should be recovered. Maintaining the distinctive of being a Christian, particularly in a postmodern world, is crucial both for the individual and for the church. For that, we return to Hauerwas and Willimon's *Resident Aliens* and take a brief look.

### **Resident Aliens aka Sojourners**

We reiterate the two authors' critique of the modern church's attempt (epitomized for them in Paul Tillich) to have readmittance to the public discussion table by revamping the language of the church and gospel, "By the very act of our modern theological attempts at translation, we have unconsciously distorted the gospel and transformed it into something it never claimed to be – ideas abstracted from Jesus, rather than Jesus with his people."<sup>1</sup> Aside the potential problems posed to the authority of scripture, Karl Barth is commended for his understanding of applying the gospel to the world rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 21.

accommodating the gospel to the world. Hauerwas and Willimon side with Barth over Tillich in the approach the church should take to an unbelieving world:

In Barth we rediscovered the New Testament assertion that the purpose of theological endeavor is not to describe the world in terms that make sense, but rather to change lives, to be re-formed in light of the stunning assertions of the gospel. Each age must come, fresh and new, to the realization that God, not nations, rules the world. This we can know, not through accommodation, but through conversion.<sup>2</sup>

Hauerwas and Willimon repeatedly make the case for the church to not compromise its distinctive and to do “church” as prescribed by the scriptures. They describe this lifestyle as an “adventure,” “The church exists today as resident aliens, an adventurous colony in a society of unbelief.”<sup>3</sup> But it would be better described for the purpose of this paper as journey. Because a resident alien does not necessarily imply that one is passing through. It simply connotes a different people living in a country that is not their own. So it seems then that their goal does not necessitate going home, but trying to live where they are to the best of their abilities. And that ability, say Hauerwas and Willimon, is what the church must wield in order to be successfully submitting to their sovereign Lord. What we would add, however, is that it is not just an adventure in submission to the sovereign Lord, but a journey as a Christian sojourner tarrying through this world.

This journey sets the church “at odds with the world. This makes necessary the demanding business of being the colony of God’s righteousness in a world that refuses to acknowledge God as sovereign.”<sup>4</sup> People who are at odds with the world then live by a different code, and those codes are found in the scriptures, namely for Hauerwas and Willimon in the Sermon on the Mount. It is in Jesus’ presentation of a peculiar new set

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<sup>2</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, 28.

<sup>3</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, 49.

<sup>4</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, 94.



of codes and ethics that point to what living according to a different kingdom is like. In other words, this new code of ethics that resident aliens live by are not commanded by Jesus (the Beatitudes are not in the imperative) but are rather *shown* by Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. "Vision is the necessary prerequisite for ethics. So the Beatitudes are not a strategy for achieving a better society, they are an indication, a picture. A vision of the inbreaking of a new society. They are indicatives, promises, instances, imaginative examples of life in the kingdom of God."<sup>5</sup> So then as resident aliens, or sojourners, Christians are to live by a different code of ethics.

True to their background of Wesleyan perfectionism, Hauerwas and Willimon argue then that Christians must live as moral people according to the new code of ethics of God's kingdom mentioned above. And the teaching of these morals occurs within the church, and not in the world. They liken the teaching of morals to the learning of a language. One does not learn the rules of grammar before being able to speak the language. No, she hears others speak it and watch others use it in order to learn how to speak the language. Likewise, one ought not to teach morals as simply a system of rules and laws to follow. Instead it is best learned when it is shown: How does one live morally? What do these rules look like when lived out?

You learn to speak by being initiated into a community of language, by observing your elders, by imitating them. The rules of grammar come later, if at all, as a way of enabling you to nourish and sustain the art of speaking well. Ethics, as an academic discipline, is simply the task of assembling reminders that enable us to remember how to speak and to live the language of the gospel....So the church can do nothing more "ethical" than to expose us to significant examples of Christian living. In fact, our ethical reflection, at its best, is usually nothing more than reflection on significant examples.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, 84.

<sup>6</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon, 97.

So these things are shaped in community, namely what Hauerwas and Willimon call the colony of resident aliens. And we note that there is strength and accountability in such numbers as well as the better capacity for the transmitting of such truths through the generations.

It is no accident that the suggestions made by Hauerwas and Willimon are similar to what have been suggested throughout this treatise. It is because the proposal of living as aliens and strangers in this world is the same. What is important to note here, is that although the delivery may be different through the years (It has been over 20 years since the book's first publication!) the message/content is the same. Hauerwas and Willimon were addressing the churches at the cusp of the 90's that brought us the dark times of economic recession and grunge music, and this treatise is entreating the young Christian postmodern generations of the techno-savvy, global 2000's and 10's.<sup>7</sup> This "same message – different delivery", was exemplified in our discussion of Paul's proselytizing paradigm in Acts 13 and 17. The delivery may be different, but the message stays the same. It must stay the same. And so we remind the church once again to uphold our sojourner identity and live it out ethically upright as God's people to be a salt and light of the world.

### **Another Scriptural Exhortation**

Let us now conclude with this final look into God's word. Philippians 3:18-21 reads,

For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and

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<sup>7</sup> Even using the nomenclature for the decades seems entirely foreign for one who grew up in the 80's and 90's!

their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

There is juxtaposition here of two contrasting groups, enemies of the cross of Christ and those whose citizenship are in heaven. So what are the two types like? First, the enemies of the cross of Christ find their belonging and purpose on earthly things and find their destiny in destruction. Their god is their stomach, and we see why their destiny is destruction because the things they glory in are shameful. Ultimately they set their minds on earthly things.<sup>8</sup> In the context of those of the “true circumcision”<sup>9</sup> we understand that Paul is talking to the Judaizers whose over emphasis on Mosaic kosher laws makes the enemies of the cross worship their god who is their stomach. And their glory is their shame for glorying in the ceremonial laws instead of the covenantal God who wrote them. But Ralph Martin explains it is better to understand it as enemies of the cross being the Jewish Christian Gnosticizing teachers in 2 Corinthians 10-13, addressing the false idea of relaxing the moral law. “They had succumbed to a tendency known as antinomianism, *i.e.* a throwing off of the moral code and decent behaviour on the mistaken ground that the body was an irrelevance once the mind had been illumined and the soul redeemed.”<sup>10</sup> Then, if their god is their fleshly desires, what they glory in is shameful and earthly and therefore their destiny is destruction. This is the description of the enemies of the cross.

Verses 20-21 on the other hand, clearly explain the sojourner identity by describing its belonging and its telos. The Christian’s citizenship is in heaven. It is not of the earth. And not only that, but the purpose and hope of the Christian are not of

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<sup>8</sup> Philippians 3:19.

<sup>9</sup> Philippians 3:3.

<sup>10</sup> Ralph Martin, *Philippians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1987), 161.

earthly things, but for their Lord's return from heaven. And their destiny is one of glorification. So Christians find their belonging and purpose on heavenly things and find their destiny in glory. Upon the return of their Lord, they will be glorified. It can be further said, then, that their minds are set not on earthly things, but on heavenly things, since they long for the return of their Lord from heaven. Martin summarizes as such,

The apostle here indicates the double allegiance of the Philippian Christians. As Roman subjects they are citizens of the far distant, capital city of Rome, where the emperor has his residence. As servants of 'another king, one called Jesus' (Acts 17:7), they are citizens of that capital city, where the King of kings has his domicile, and whose advent to establish his reign on this earth and to rescue his people (1 Thes. 1:10) is awaited. Here on earth, meanwhile, they are resident aliens who dwell temporarily in a foreign country, but have their citizenship elsewhere (cf. Heb. 11:13; Jas. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:11).<sup>11</sup>

And this is an apt description of the second group of people in this passage. This is the similar discussion of being bicultural as introduced in the introduction. Therefore, Christians' bicultural identity and allegiance must be properly balanced because of their submission to their covenantal Lord.

Paul writes that the fact that there are enemies of the cross of Christ and that they live in such manner brings him to tears. What is alarming is that today, the description of the "enemies of the cross" seem appropriate for our young postmodern generation Christians. This then produces a new fountain of tears for God's covenant community. A whole generation is living without knowing who they really are and missing out on the satisfaction of living a life fulfilled in Christ. And the resulting travesty is that there is a world out there unreached with the light of the gospel truth and with the love of the savior Lord. We believe in the sovereignty of God and that his word does not return empty to him.<sup>12</sup> His will will be done, and so this treatise has been an effort to awaken

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<sup>11</sup> Martin, 163.

<sup>12</sup> Isaiah 55:11.

the postmodern generational Christian and church to live lives as God's citizens, yearning for His return, for His kingdom to be here on earth as it is in heaven.

The thrust of this treatise thus far has been and is for us to be the latter group. And this only happens once we understand the relationship we have with our covenantal Lord. It was the guiding principle for Daniel and for Paul and must be so for Christian postmodern generations today. For that purpose a four part bible study series on otherworldliness and Daniel will be included in the appendix, to hopefully point the church heavenward. Paul said "all of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained."<sup>13</sup> Let us live up to what we have been called to. Our young postmodern generational Christians (myself included) would do well to sit (chapter 1's "in community" above) at the feet of our elders and learn some maturity on the matter as well. Nevertheless, we also have a cloud of witnesses who have gone ahead of us to mark the way. Let us do away with our chronological snobbery<sup>14</sup> and mature in our faith.

### **Final Exhortation**

In recent years, it has been the trend of movies and TV shows of doing remakes of past shows or doing "prequels."<sup>15</sup> This trend points to two things. First there is nothing new under the sun<sup>16</sup>; so Hollywood is running out of ideas. And the second is the

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<sup>13</sup> Philippians 3:15-16.

<sup>14</sup> C.S. Lewis in chapter 1 above.

<sup>15</sup> The Star Wars prequels (ep 1-3), Smallville, Chronicles of Riddick, Batman Begins, Dukes of Hazard Movie, A-Team movie, the list goes on and on.

<sup>16</sup> Ecclesiastes 1:9.

postmodern penchant for stories. Postmoderns want to know the story behind the story. So finding out what led to the famous stories that everyone knows adds a new angle to the old story. Knowing just how Superman got to be Superman and following that teenage angst through multiple seasons of a TV show captivates the audience (it did not hurt that the actors were all good looking either). Watching the psychological development of a prodigy into the villainous Darth Vader or the vengeance driven boy turned hero in Batman or to see who Hollywood would cast for BA Baracus piques our interest so much that we are willing to “religiously” watch our TV sets every week or drive on down to the movie theater to watch a movie (sometimes even willing to wait in long lines to get in!). We should do the same with Christianity. It is a return to the original story that brings us to our Christian roots. Let us remember, then, the prequels that set us on this journey; a journey where I fear so many young Christians have gone wayward. Let us revisit the story of our salvation testimony (episode 3) and then go further back and see how that resonates with the saints of the past (episode 2), and then go even further back to see how so many of these professing Christians and followers of Yahweh were called and chosen by a creator God from the beginning of time<sup>17</sup> climaxing at the point in history on the cross, where God himself would lay his life down for his people (episode 1)! To carry the movie metaphor further, after the prequels come the anticipation for the sequel. So after watching these prequels then we have a renewed hope and longing for the sequel! What else is there in the sequel except for the triumphant return of our savior to come and consummate God’s kingdom? The longing

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<sup>17</sup> Romans 8:29-30, Ephesians 1:4-6.

and angst for restoration and glorification of both creation and of God's people<sup>18</sup> will finally find its fruition in this sequel.

Christian postmodern generations must not lose sight of these prequels that are the back stories of their faith. It is once this is remembered that our identity as sojourners – as citizens not of this world and instead a people of God – can and will shape our living in a postmodern world. It will make us oblivious to the pursuits of this world where consumerism and materialism is not what drives us but is simply a medium we recognize and points us to the hurting needs of this world where people are hungering for truth and love. This drives us to a purpose of not just living for ourselves, but to serve as God's kingdom workers of bringing justice, truth, and love to the lost and hurting people of the world. Along with this effect of turning Christian postmodern generations' perspective from inward to outward, the anticipation of the sequel to come helps prioritize our lives in the present. It helps us to live by a different set of rules – principles of God's kingdom and not of this world's kingdom. This revolutionary code of ethics was shared by Jesus himself on the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>19</sup> And within that sermon, we are reminded to store up our treasures in heaven and not on earth, for the very purpose of having our eyes and our hearts fixed on the right kingdom, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."<sup>20</sup> So if our hearts are where our treasure is, and if our treasures are in heaven, then we will not

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<sup>18</sup> Romans 8:22-23.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 5-7.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 6:19-21.

have a Christian generation that loses itself in worldly pursuits, but rather a generation with a biblical purpose for living, regardless of its cultural and contemporary context. This would then become a timeless understanding of the faith and an important guide for future Christians as well.

And ultimately the prayer of this treatise, for a generation that seems so unaware of who they are in Christ, is the first portion of the Lord's Prayer: "Our *Father* [emphasis mine for knowing our identity] in heaven, hallowed be thy name. *Thy kingdom come* [emphasis mine for knowing what our purpose ought to be]; thy will be done on earth as it is in *heaven* [emphasis mine for us to know where our eschatological hope is as God's people]." In Jesus Name, Amen.



## APPENDIX 1

### ACCULTURATION SURVEY

**1. Is it okay to drink alcohol as a Christian that's 21 and over?**

- a. No
  - b. Yes, sometimes
  - c. Yes, always
- If yes, when is it okay?

**2. Is it okay for a Christian to live with someone of the opposite gender (not in a group, but one on one) before marriage?**

- a. No
  - b. Yes, sometimes
  - c. Yes, always
- If yes, when is it okay?

**3. How far is too far for a Christian to contextualize (relate to non-Christians)?**

- a. You shouldn't contextualize
- b. Enough to understand non-Christians
- c. Enough for non-Christians to understand you
- d. Until you're indistinguishable

write any comments below

**4. Do you think that as a Christian you should be different from non-Christians**

- a. No
- b. Yes

why or why not?

**5. Do you struggle with being in the world but not of the world?**

- a. No
- b. Yes

why? (please specify below)

**6. How would you define legalism? (can choose more than one)**

- a. over-emphasis on the law or rules of conduct
- b. following rules or laws to get to heaven

- c. old-fashioned lifestyle
- d. living strictly according to the law

**7. Would you consider yourself legalistic or moralistic?**

- a. No
- b. Yes

**8. Would you consider your parents as legalistic or moralistic?**

- a. No
- b. Yes

If yes, how has this affected you?

**9. Would you consider the church you grew up in to be legalistic or moralistic?**

- a. No
- b. Yes

If yes, how has this affected you?

**10. If you answered yes to either one of questions 3 or 4, then did your parents'/church's legalistic attitude cause you to be more conservative or less conservative in your lifestyle?**

- a. Less conservative
- b. More conservative

## APPENDIX 2

### 4 BIBLE STUDIES ON OTHERWORLDLINESS

As Korean-Americans, we are all familiar with the identity crisis between Korean culture and American culture. Most who belabored through the process of figuring out their identity would consider it a handicap or a deficiency. However, we can consider it a blessed practice run for our Christian faith as we tackle the Christian's identity of "in this world, but not of this world" as described by Jesus (John 15:19, 17:6). In order to help us think this through biblically, we will study two apostles' take on it and explore two case studies from another biblical character and his friends that underwent the same cultural and spiritual identity crisis.

#### **1 Peter 2:9-12**

At times it is not easy to know who we are. Whether it be the journey of finding oneself through adolescence or across two cultures, knowing who we are can be very difficult. This would also affect our spiritual identity as well. In his first epistle, Peter helps to clarify who we are as Christians, so that there is no confusion. Read 1 Peter 2:9-12 looking for what Peter says about the Christian's identity.

Chosen Identity:

1. Who does Peter say we are in Christ? (v. 9)
2. "Holy nation" and "royal priesthood" are explicit Old Testament references. Why is this important?
3. What significance is there that we are chosen and that we belong to someone?
4. What is it like not to belong?
5. What was our condition before being made God's people? (v.10)

As modern day members of a democracy, the privilege of being "a people belonging to God" may not hold much significance. In order to illustrate how deplorable it is when one is people-less, think about the movie "The Terminal" (2004) starring Tom Hanks and Catherine Zeta-Jones. Tom Hanks' character, Viktor Navorski, becomes people-less at JFK airport when his country undergoes a coup de tat. Because of that, Viktor's passport becomes useless, and he is left without a country. So Viktor is stuck in the airport terminal having to find ways to avoid getting deported and coming up with ways to find food and just survive. It isn't only until his country's

government is restored that Viktor is allowed to leave the airport, visit his father's love of jazz, and return back to his country.

6. If you are a people of God now, then what privileges and responsibilities would we have?
7. So for what purpose are we made God's people? (v. 9)

Aliens and Strangers:

8. What does Peter call Christians? (v.11)
9. If we are aliens and strangers of this world, then we are not of this world. So then how does he tell us to live? (v.11)
10. So then where is our citizenship?
11. So for what purpose are we called to live in a world that we don't have citizenship? (v.12)
12. Have you been living as if you are a citizen of this world?

For our next lesson, in order to understand a bit more what these sinful desires are and how they relate to the fact that we are aliens and strangers of this world, we will turn to Apostle John's discussion on this matter.

### **1 John 2:15-17**

After having seen who we are in Christ, we now turn to the first epistle of John to help understand better what Peter meant by living as aliens and strangers of this world. After explaining that we are God's children, John further explains what a child of God should not do. Read 1 John 2:15-17 while looking for what loving the world or living for the world means.

1. What do you think "world" means here?

“World” in the Greek is “kosmos”. Greek scholars and lexicons define kosmos in various ways. Here are five pertinent definitions found in Koine Greek lexicons<sup>1</sup>: 1. the physical earth 2. people, mankind 3. the universe 4. the habitation of humanity 5. morally speaking, mankind as alienated from God or unredeemed and hostile to God.

2. In order to fully understand Apostle John’s usage of “world”, we need to survey his other writings. Using the five definitions for kosmos from above, explain how John uses the word “world” in the following passages:
  - a. John 1:10 (the universe)
  - b. John 12:19 (people, mankind)
  - c. John 16:21 (habitation of humanity)
  - d. John 21:25 (physical earth)
  - e. 1 John 5:19 (lost in sin, wholly at odds with anything divine, ruined and depraved)
3. So now which of these five do you think pertains to “the world” in 1 John 2:15-17?
4. So then how can we understand that love for the world (as unredeemed and hostile to God) means that the love of the Father is not in the person?
5. What three things describe the lifestyle of living for the world or loving the world? (v. 16)
6. John explains that those three things are not from the Father. Although John does not write it here, in contrast to v.16, what three things can we imagine are from the Father?
7. What other reason is there not to live for the things of the world? (v.17)
8. What promise does John give about living for the Father’s will instead? (v.17)
  - a. Do you find that this is compelling reason enough today? Why or why not?

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<sup>1</sup> BDAG and Friberg Greek Lexicon

This passage is another reminder for us that this world is not our home. We are called to a new identity as citizens of God's kingdom. This world's kingdom will not last, while God's kingdom will last forever.

In our next study will explore a biblical case study of people who lived this way of life.

### **Daniel 1:1-21**

Daniel is a perfect example of someone who lived as an alien and stranger of the world while clinging to the will and desires of the Father. Let's take a look at Daniel's first encounter with the Babylonian world and study what living as a citizen of God's kingdom in a different kingdom looks like. Read Daniel 1:1-21.

1. What happened to Israel? (v.1-2)
2. What are some major adjustments (the process is called acculturation) involved when moving to a new culture or new kingdom?
3. What are three cultural changes that happen to Daniel when he is taken captive to Babylon? (v.4,5,7)
4. Why is having your name changed a big deal?
5. What was the thing that Daniel did not want to adjust to in the new kingdom of Babylon? (v.8)
6. Why do you think Daniel did not want to eat the royal food and wine?

There are many scholarly discussions as to why Daniel considered eating the king's food a particularly heinous defilement. Some explain that it was because the food was unclean (or not kosher), or because the food was offered to idols, but a more probable reason is because of what was symbolized by eating the king's food. The NIV describes the food as "food...from the king's table" (v.5), "royal food" (v.8), and "choice food" (v.16). The NASB translates the food as the "king's choice food", and the NKJV translates it as the "king's delicacies". In the Hebrew the word is "*pathag*", and the only other time it occurs in the bible outside of Daniel 1 is Daniel 11:26. Two bible scholars, Joyce Baldwin and WS Towner, explained on two

different occasions that “*patbag*” in Daniel 11:26 is more than just eating choice food. They explained that sharing “the king’s board also [meant] entering into a covenantal relationship with him.”<sup>2</sup> So then we can understand that for Daniel, eating the royal food meant more than just adjusting to a new kingdom, but instead it meant changing sides. It meant switching his allegiance from God to King Nebuchadnezzar.

7. What relational significance is there in eating together? In other words, do you eat with just anyone?
8. What would be an example of some modern day signs of allegiance?
9. Have you ever done one of those acts of allegiance without even realizing what it symbolized? Or have you been transferring your citizenship from God’s kingdom to the kingdom of this world?
10. In light of the issue of allegiance here in Daniel and last lesson’s study on “the world” in 1 John 2:15-17, read James 4:4 and discuss James’ description of the world and God.

Daniel’s adamant refusal to eat the king’s food was to show that although his name could be changed, he could learn a new language, and he could be forced to work in the kingdom of Babylon, Daniel would never make allegiance with another king or have a “friendship with the world”. This was because Daniel always lived with the knowledge and reality that his citizenship was not of a kingdom in this world but rather of another kingdom, God’s kingdom. In our next lesson, we will look at another case of maintaining one’s other-worldly identity in the face of the world’s demand to join it.

### **Daniel 3:1-30**

In today’s lesson we see an example of how powers of the world deify themselves and expect others to worship them. In light of this blatant encroachment upon the true God, Yahweh, we see how Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to comply and make a firm stand for remaining true to their God. The story we find in Daniel 3 shows how God’s people make a stand when living in a different kingdom requires it. Please read Daniel 3 as you think about the Christian’s identity as citizen of God’s kingdom in light of the world’s demand for allegiance.

1. What is the command issued to the officials of the Babylonian kingdom? (v. 5-6)
2. What wording does the herald use to address them? (v.4)

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<sup>2</sup> W. Sibley Towner, *Daniel* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1984), 25.

3. What significance is there in that the call is for “peoples, nations, and men of every language?”
4. Can you think of some modern day examples that call for humans to show their allegiance to the world’s kingdom?
5. Such examples are excellent opportunities for Christians to show their different citizenship or other-worldliness.
6. Who were the ones that had ill feelings for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?
7. Why do you think that was so? What reasons would they have to dislike the Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? (v.8)
8. Do you live in a way where your other-worldliness bothers the natives? If yes, please share how you do so? If no, should we be living in a way that bothers the natives?
9. What is Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s response to King Nebuchadnezzar? (v.16-18).
10. Our commitment to something these days is very conditional. So why is Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego’s response in v. 18 so amazing?
11. So what happens next? (v.19-27)
12. How would you feel if God did not save Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?  
And what was Job’s response in a similar situation where God didn’t immediately save? (Job 1:20-22)

It may sound incredibly unfair to make such a stand for God without His immediate salvation, but 1 John 2:17 reminds us that those who do the will of God live forever. And this is a clear declaration that this world is not our home, but rather our home is in heaven, in God’s kingdom. So there is nothing unfair about losing our time here on this earth if we see the eternal perspective and realize that instead we would be able to live



forever in heaven, in God's kingdom. In fact, such a life would be a huge gain (cf. Philippians 1:21-24).

13. What was King Nebuchadnezzar's response? (v. 28-30)

14. Was what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did simply for the sake of being rebellious or being suicidal to take a shortcut to heaven? (read 1 Peter 2:9, 12 to refresh your memories from our first lesson)

We are reminded once again that our firm stand and allegiance as God's people is not for the sake of disruption but for the sake of God being praised. Here we are also made aware of the complete commitment we have as God's people. That even if it hurts, even with the possibility of our time here on earth ending, we look with an eternal perspective and with our hopes set on our true kingdom in heaven and remain wholly committed to our citizenship in God's kingdom. May we then be all the more encouraged and strengthened by the Holy Spirit to press on living with our identity as "in the world but not of the world".

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